Critical Consciousness-Raising: High School Teachers' Collective Strategies to Engage Students' Inspiragination

Kiera Havill

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2021

Critical Consciousness-Raising: High School Teachers’ Collective Strategies to Engage Students’ *Inspiragination*

Kiera Havill
CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING: HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS’ COLLECTIVE STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE STUDENTS’ INSPIRAGINATION

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
Pitzer College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
Bachelor of Arts Degrees
in Sociology and Critical Global Studies

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APRIL 2021

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ABSTRACT

This study is a collection of strategies and practices utilized by ten high school teachers to inspire their students to engage with their critical consciousness as well as think critically about the world and their lived realities. Through this research, the study seeks to better understand how high school teachers create environments within their classrooms in which students question what exists, reflect on their own identities relative to the world, and engage in *inspiragination*. To examine this, 10 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with high school teachers were conducted via phone or Zoom. After cross-analyzing the interview transcripts, 10 themes arose relative to teachers encouraging their students to engage with their critical consciousness. These include, but are not limited to, 1) teachers should cultivate content so that students find it relevant to their lives 2) there should be effort, energy, and intention placed into building relationships with one’s students 3) don’t be afraid to share your story 4) the physical layout of the learning environment should be humanizing 5) life is contradictory and complex: teach it that way 6) psychological and physical safety should be a top priority 7) approaches to discipline and utilizing your real and assumed power 8) teaching as a political act? 9) these things may burn you out: here’s what they are and some mitigation strategies 10) inspiragination: a fluid concept.

Additionally, the findings suggest that teaching is not ‘perfect-able’ – while one can implement and be cognizant of these themes, strategies, and practices (and more!), it is important to recognize that your own unique being combined with a particular group of students is not replicable…

…so go get ‘em! 😊
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Jung Min Choi. Not only would this project not exist without you, but I would most definitely not be the person I am today without your profound influence. I am eternally grateful for the time and effort you spent with me in countless office hours, just letting me talk through life together with you. You ignited my critical consciousness, consequently leading me to come up with a word to describe your impact on my life (inspiragation), and ultimately inspired me to be a teacher so that I could influence those in ways similar to your influence on me. I seriously cannot thank you enough, words will never be enough.

The completion of this these would also not have been possible without the guidance, motivation, and mentorship from my research advisor, Dr. Azamat Junisbai. I am so thankful for your unwavering support throughout this entire process. I greatly appreciate all of the time and energy you have expended to ensure its completion; I seriously cannot thank you enough.

I am also fortunate to have been advised and mentored by Dr. Sharon Snowiss, my second thesis reader. Thank you so much for pushing me along this journey and reigniting my drive whenever I was feeling doubtful. It was always easier to write after chatting with you.

I would like to thank Joe Parker, the one who reminded me that I need to “stop taking the wind out of my own sails.” That was a pivotal moment for me, both in this project, but also in life. You inspired me to reimagine what the confines of this project could look like, but ultimately taught me that there don’t need to be confines at all. Thank you.

This goes without saying, but this project most definitely would not be possible without the dedication, time, and energy of the inspirational educators I was fortunate to engage with. Thank you so much to all of you – I can’t even begin to tell you how much you are appreciated, not only by me, but by so many students that you have and continue to influence.

Finally, thank you to my parents, Sara Havill and Ian Havill, for never failing to be there for me. Thank you, Kendall, my younger sister, for never failing to humble me. Thank you, Grandma Pam, for never failing to welcome me with open arms into your home when I had writer’s block. Thank you, Megan, my best friend, who I have been fortunate to know for 18 years, for never failing to make me laugh when I’ve needed it the most.

This would not have even been an idea without you all. Thank you, thank you, thank you.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This is written for those who are teachers, for those who want to be teachers, or for those who want to understand a sliver of what teaching entails. This project exists because I had an educator that not only turned my world upside down, but inspired me to recognize the power I hold to make a difference in the world through the tool of education. When this project idea was just a tiny thought bubble in my brain, it came to life while I was contemplating and reflecting thinking, what the heck was that magic?! I really wanted to understand how I could, to some degree, emulate what they did when I became an educator. Although I discovered the term “critical consciousness” through my research, I was left unsatisfied. I felt that there still wasn’t a word that existed to describe how this person impacted my life… yet. Therefore, I created a word, inspiragation (inspire(d) + imagination) to encapsulate the essence of being inspired to imagine, because that word is as close to that experience as I can put it into words.

I also want to acknowledge a few other things before you dive in. First of all, I find myself to be a person with a lot of ideas as well as a ‘yes’ person. Combined, I honestly found it somewhat difficult to veto some of the ideas I had for this project; my mind wandering to this and that, to this question, and that analogy, etc., and I hope you find yourself similarly bouncing your own ideas, experiences, and thoughts off of those I collected and created. Secondly, I intentionally use my voice throughout this paper for two reasons: 1) I think it’s more engaging for the reader, and 2) I want to push back against the phenomenon that academic work should be written solely in a stereotypical, ‘academic’ manner. I am not aiming to ‘sound smart’ for you. I am rather aiming to provide you with teaching strategies that may inspire you or encourage you to inspire others. Finally, I’ve provided some very scientific graphs below to represent how I relate to and make sense of this immeasurable, qualitative project – I hope that they’re helpful!
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins by introducing Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and Michel Foucault, all significant educators and theorists that heavily inspired and influenced this research project. It then differentiates between critical thinking and critical consciousness-raising, given that my own research process involved understanding how the two are in relation to one another. Next, I explore seven teaching strategies that arose throughout my research, then conclude by illuminating some ‘gaps’ in the current literature.

Disclaimer: Throughout this review, my goal is to share the knowledge I gained from researching strategies to encourage critical consciousness-raising within high school students. Although it has been extensive in both the literature review and interviews, I must simultaneously assert my belief that the research cannot and should not ever end; teaching is not something one can perfect, given that it is both an art and praxis. There is not an end point one can come to; there is no checklist to accomplish.¹ Seriously imagine a teacher putting their hands on their knees, breathing heavily, “I did it! I perfected teaching!” I’m sorry, but no. I whole-heartedly believe that you got this, I really do, but one can’t ever fully prepare for this transformational occupation. Thus, the aim of this review is to provide you with some, but not all, literature that exists on the subject of critical consciousness-raising. Both because the scope of this project can’t obtain all that exists, as well as because strategies are constantly in creation. As I’m typing this right now, and you’re reading this sometime in the future, some educator is reflecting and thinking, *dang, that really worked!*

¹ As someone obsessed with list-making, this was honestly hard to realize at first.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This project would not exist without the influence and insight of Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and Michel Foucault. Below I have provided some significant contributions of these theorists that have and continue to shape my understanding of what education has been, is, and could be.

paulo freire

Brazilian philosopher, educator, and theorist, Paulo Freire, was the first to influence my understanding of education through his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I’d argue this is a must-read for anyone interested in teaching or education in general. Freire begins by differentiating between the oppressor and the oppressed, stating that “The oppressor, who is himself² dehumanized because he dehumanizes others, is unable to lead this struggle” (Freire, 1970:47). By struggle, Freire is referring to the struggle for freedom³, which he argues is achieved through first becoming aware of the oppressions and injustices that permeate the world, “Liberation is thus a childbirth, and a painful one. The man or woman who emerges is a new person, viable only as the oppressor-oppressed contradiction is superseded by the humanization of all people … no longer oppressor no longer oppressed, but human in the process of achieving freedom” (Freire, 1970:49). Although Freire poses that education is a tool used to strive for freedom, he acknowledges how educational institutions can simultaneously perpetuate all that those interested in liberation are working to dismantle and transform. Thus, Freire differentiates between the *Banking Method of Education* and the *Problem-Posing Method of Education*. He argues that educators should reject the *Banking Method of Education* and instead practice the

² Although Freire gifts the world transformational literature and theory, he often uses ‘he,’ ‘him,’ ‘himself,’ or ‘his’ throughout his work to refer to any human being, which I acknowledge erases other gender identities.
³ Freire’s definition of freedom: “the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion” (Freire, 1970:47)
Problem-Posing Method of Education. Below I’ve created a table that highlights significant characteristics of each method directly pulled from Pedagogy of the Oppressed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BANKING METHOD</th>
<th>PROBLEM-POSING METHOD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher posits reality as a “motionless, static, compartmentalized, and static” entity (71)</td>
<td>Teacher practices a “constant unveiling of reality” striving for the “emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality” (81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are taught to memorize mechanically; the more the students “permit themselves to be filled, the better the students they are” (72)</td>
<td>Students are respected as “critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher” (81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher is presented as the students’ “necessary opposite” assuming “their ignorance as absolute” which then “justifies his own existence” (72)</td>
<td>The primary role of the teacher is to create alongside and with the students; teachers are understood as both teachers and students (72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an “assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely in the world, not with the world or with others; the individual is spectator, not re-creator” (75)</td>
<td>Dialogue and communication are understood as critical and necessary for liberation (84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student is not seen as a “conscious being,” but rather the “possessor of a consciousness: an empty ’mind’ passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside (75)</td>
<td>Encourages students to be critical thinkers, constantly in a state of questioning the world and their lived realities (84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encourages creativity and bridges the students’ consciousness with the world – striving for students to recognize themselves as fully human while simultaneously striving for their own and others’ humanization (84)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Freire is also known for his pairing of ‘theory’ and ‘praxis,’⁴ arguing that transformation and liberation is not possible without them, “This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis” (Freire, 1970:65). Freire asserts that theory and praxis should be inextricably bound, and that critical reflection is a core piece of this continuous and reflective

⁴ praxis: a fancy word for ‘practice’
cycle, “As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they
discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. In this way, the presence of the oppressed in
the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed
involvement” (Freire, 1970:69). Together, teachers and students are active agents of permanent
creation and recreation, particularly if the teacher is able to foster a learning environment in
which students can tap into and engage with their critical consciousness.

Freire posits the significance of critical consciousness relative to intellectual liberation,
articulating how one’s critical consciousness is ever transforming through critical thinking,
reflection, and dialogue,

…true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking; thinking
which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of
no dichotomy between them; thinking which perceives reality as process, as
transformation, rather than as a static entity; thinking which does not separate itself from
action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved
(Freire, 1970:92).

Throughout Freire’s book, Education for Critical Consciousness, he problematizes the
purpose of critical consciousness-raising and why it’s necessary for individual and collective
liberation. Freire asserts that one’s critical consciousness assumes “what is true today may not be
so tomorrow” (Freire, 1973:44). That being said, Freire believes that the purpose of education
partially involves recognizing how one is oriented towards others and in relation with the world
around them; arguing for “an education of ‘I wonder,’ instead of merely, ‘I do’” (Freire,
1973:36). Freire shares that one of the most fundamental pieces of igniting a state of wonder is
something we partake in nearly every day: dialogue.
Freire distinguishes between anti-dialogue and dialogue, the former referring to idle chatter or discussion that perpetuates thinking waves of normalcy and passivity, which often leaves people unlikely to “develop or ‘open’ their consciousness.” (Freire, 1973:15). Instead, he proposes a dialogue between persons in which there is a horizontal relationship of communication and understanding:

This encourages a “loving, humble, hopeful, trusting, and critical” dialogue,

While the latter encourages a “loveless, arrogant, hopeless, mistrustful, and acritical” dialogue (Freire, 1973:45). In the context of education, it is integral that teachers recognize which type of dialogue they find themselves practicing, “Teaching cannot be done from the top down, but from the inside out … with collaboration of the educator” (Freire, 1973:48). Thinking back on your own educational experiences, can you recall instances of either form, as a student or educator? How did they feel?

With this in mind, Freire connects the role of dialogue with raising one’s critical consciousness, examining how reality is susceptible to remain unchanged without one gaining the ability to critically wonder. One of the first steps includes partaking in dialogue which

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5 Have you noticed how obsessed we seem to become with the weather when there is uncomfortable silence or nothing to talk about? How do you feel when you’re engaging in ‘small talk?’ Do you like it?
cultivates this desire to question why things are the way they are, and how we may fit into that why. Freire shifts this internal experience of knowing to doing,

If men are unable to perceive critically the themes of their time, and thus to intervene actively in reality, they are carried along in the wake of change … and a society beginning to move from one epoch to another requires the development of an especially flexible, critical spirit. Lacking such a spirit, men cannot perceive the marked contradictions which occur in society as emerging values in search of affirmation and fulfillment clash with earlier values seeking self-preservation (Freire, 1973:7).

Ultimately, Freire shares the potential influence educators can have on their students by cultivating a learning space in which problem-posing educational methods are practiced, dialogue is reciprocated, and critical consciousness is ignited, all in an effort to work toward the transformation and liberation of our hearts, minds, and spirits.

bell hooks

Author, educator, social activist, and feminist, bell hooks, introduces Teaching to Transgress with an anecdote of her early school experience, “I loved being a student. I loved learning. School was the place of ecstasy-pleasure and danger. To be changed by ideas was pure pleasure” (hook, 1994:3). However, after racial integration, “Knowledge was suddenly about information only. It had no relation to how one lived, behaved. It was no longer connected to antiracist struggle … Too much eagerness to learn could be easily seen as a threat to white authority … education was no longer about the practice of freedom. Realizing this, I lost my love of school” (hooks, 1994:3). Unfortunately, hooks’ latter experience is one that resonates with thousands of K-12 experiences across the U.S. and globe, exemplifying Freire’s Banking Method of Education. Compounded by intersections of race, gender, and other identifiers (both visible and invisible), hooks illuminates how schooling can be a space of violence and domination, stating how the “classroom began to feel more like a prison, a place of punishment and confinement rather than a place of promise and possibility” (hooks, 1994:4). Although hooks
acknowledges the permeation of the Banking Method across educational institutions, she simultaneously admits, “the first paradigm that shaped my pedagogy was the idea that the classroom should be an exciting place, never boring … Neither Freire’s work nor feminist pedagogy examined the notion of pleasure in the classroom” (hooks, 1994:7). Are students entering classrooms with anxiety, concern, and insecurity, or with an eager desire to be courageous, thoughtful, and curious? If not the second one, how do we reimagine what schooling can look like, that centers pleasure at the heart of learning?

hooks became curious to imagine the ways in which teaching and learning could be different to comprise pleasure and excitement. This pleasure, hooks argues, is infrequently created solely through the individual effort of the educator, “It is rare that any professor, no matter how eloquent a lecturer, can generate through his or her actions enough excitement to create an exciting classroom. Excitement is generated through collective effort” (hooks, 1994:8). Although it is not up to the teacher to generate that euphoric and effervescent climate, it is partially their responsibility to be transparent in expecting the creation of such a climate to be a collective effort. Thus, hooks pushes for educators to destabilize the assumed and real power they hold, encouraging students to be freely in dialogue with one another about what they want their learning to look like, as well as ensuring that students are actively humanizing each other, interested “in one another, in hearing one another’s voices, in recognizing one another’s presence” (hooks, 1994:8). This requires the educator to not only permit but push for vulnerable and authentic expression and communication amongst students and themselves. Additionally, hooks encourages the practice of Engaged Pedagogy which,

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6 This led my imagination to think of a famous singer on stage, the supposed holder of talent, excitement, and energy. Would the electricity in the room, the collective effervescence, be the same without the thousands of fans in the crowd?
begins with the assumption that we learn best when there is an interactive relationship between students and teacher. As leaders and facilitators, teachers must discover what the students know and what they need to know. This discovery happens only if teachers are willing to engage students beyond a surface level. As teachers, we can create a climate for optimal learning if we understand the level of emotional awareness and emotional intelligence in the classroom. That means we need to take time to assess who we are teaching (hooks, 2010:19).

Students bring complex, intersectional identities to every learning experience, and hooks argues that teachers should prioritize their time and energy into understanding their students as whole human beings, rather than solely students. Within Engaged Pedagogy, dialogue is necessary, with an understanding that “to engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences” (hooks, 1994:130). This dialogue exists between both the teacher and students, as well as between students and other students, and assumes that “every student has a valuable contribution to make to the learning process” (hooks, 2010: 20). Put into practice, hooks suggests teachers provide open-ended writing prompts, such as, “my most courageous moment happened when…” or have them bring a meaningful object to class and share its value, encouraging students to share their inner light and foster community (hooks, 2010:20). hooks concludes,

The most exciting aspect of critical thinking in the classroom is that it calls for initiative from everyone, actively inviting all students to think passionately and to share ideas in a passionate, open manner. When everyone in the classroom, teacher and students, recognizes that they are responsible for creating a learning community together, learning is at its most meaningful and useful. In such a community there is no failure. Everyone is participating and sharing whatever resource is needed at a given moment in time to ensure that we leave the classroom knowing that critical thinking empowers us (hooks, 2010:11)

Hooks emphasizes how Engaged Pedagogy also prioritizes the well-being of the educator, centering the necessity of reflection within teachers, as they “must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to
teach in a manner that empowers students” (hooks, 1994:15). Popularized as ‘self-care’ today, self-actualization and reflection are necessary in order for teachers to bring their best selves to the learning environment. Although it’s much easier said than done, it is still an important reminder that one’s own mental and emotional well-being should be prioritized when possible, and that students will also benefit from the teacher having put intention into bringing their best self to the table.

Finally, hooks introduces two extremely important components of teaching: love and imagination. Seriously, what isn’t possible with this dynamic duo?

She believes that love should openly hold space within the classroom, and that it “is assured when there is any passionate pursuit of knowledge. Such thinking counters the tenets of those critics who believe love has nothing to do with our ability to teach and learn … when we teach with love we are better able to respond to the unique concerns of individual students, while simultaneously integrating those concerns into the classroom community” (hooks, 2010:160). Directly opposing a sterile, emotionless, and loveless, learning environment, hooks encourages educators to rethink how we approach education, integrating intentions of humanization. Many of you may be thinking (I know I was), well sheesh, I already wear ten other hats that aren’t recognized (much less, compensated), now you want me to put in more energy? hooks understands this, and admits that teachers are not and should not be undercover therapists. However, she does assert “there are times when conscious teaching - teaching with love - brings us the insight that we will not be able to have a meaningful experience in the classroom without
reading the emotional climate of our students and attending to it” (hooks, 2010:160). There is no
perfect balance or combination of teaching with love that fits all. Regardless, love is a
foundational element to teaching that if treated as such, will make its way into learning
experiences one may have not imagined.

There is an important distinction to make here though relative to imagination. Although it
is nearly impossible to predict or prepare for all that comes with teaching, hooks does state that
“what we cannot imagine cannot come into being … imagination is one of the most powerful
modes of resistance that oppressed and exploited folks can and do use … when a teacher lets
loose an unfettered imagination in the classroom, the space for transformative learning is
expanded (hooks, 2010:59-62). I can’t express the extent imagination changes the game of
teaching. It is a driving force in change, and it is quite literally limitless. You think the sky is the
limit? We’ve got footprints on the moon. If the teacher whole-heartedly believes and preaches
that nothing is impossible, just improbable…⁷ that is where the magic begins to blossom. hooks
admits that “children’s passion for thinking often ends when they encounter a world that seeks to
educate them for conformity and obedience only” and that “most children are taught early on that
thinking is dangerous,” (hooks, 2010:8). Thus, educators interested in raising their students’
critical consciousness must become aware of this potential, violent conditioning, working along
students to unlearn and relearn ways of being and learning that cultivate and perpetuate love,
connection, and imagination.

michel foucault

French philosopher, social theorist, literary critic and thinker, Michel Foucault, disrupts the widely accepted modern, European conceptualizations of knowledge and power by

⁷ A professor of mine shared this with me and it has stuck with me ever since.
illuminating the ways in which power controls, disciplines, and regulates human behavior and interaction on an institutional and individual level. While Foucault died in 1984 after contracting AIDS, he lives on through his extensive work and provides theories and perspectives that have the potential to inspire the reimagination of our past, contemporary, and future realities.

Although Foucault explored a multitude of concepts and theories, this section will primarily focus on his work relative to power/knowledge, regimes of truth, épistémès, the body, dispositifs, as well as how they relate to one another and inform the disciplinary institution of education.

Foucault suggests that human knowledge and power are inextricably linked, constituting what he coined as power/knowledge. For Foucault, power is reinforced through the current socially accepted form(s) of knowledge during a particular time period. He states,

...power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (Foucault, 1995:27).

That being said, Foucault suggests that together knowledge and power reflect and simultaneously produce what is known as the ‘regime of truth,’ which is contingent and particular, but often assumed universal,

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault, 1979).

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8 This is one of several words that Foucault created, and he is the one who ultimately inspired me to create the word, inspiragination.

9 Whenever I hear someone say, “The truth is,” or “The reality is,” I think of Foucault shaking his head 😇
Given that various societies have their own regimes of truth, those residing there may assume that their relative truths are omnipresent (or understood as true all over the world). Foucault rejects the belief of universality, arguing rather that we regulate our behaviors with the intention of replicating the norms that pervade our particular society. The world is understood and perceived through this specific lens, both constructed as an effect and instrument of power.

He states that throughout the course of history, distinct time periods have each possessed a corresponding épistémè, which he defines as, “a world-view, a slice of history common to all branches of knowledge, which imposes on each one the same norms and postulates, a general state of reason, a certain structure of thought that the men of a particular period cannot escape” (Foucault, 1976:191). Each historically relevant épistémè limits what is ‘thinkable’ at that point in time. Thus, although we (as global citizens) are agents who possess autonomy and power, we are also subjected to our particular regime of truth and épistémè, thus simultaneously perpetuate the power held within a given regime of truth and épistémè.¹⁰

Both within and outside the realm of education, Foucault posits that the body operates within structures of power while at the same time recognizes the bodily autonomy, we all possess (even if we aren’t aware of this agency). Our bodies are both consciously and unconsciously controlled, maintained, restrained, and dominated; we are simultaneously surveilled and regulated by both external forces and ourselves. Foucault states, “The classical age discovered the body as an object and target of power. It is easy enough to find signs of the attention then paid to the body - the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes

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¹⁰ An example of this would be how hand gestures and greetings differ across the world. In the United States, putting your hand out into a fist with your thumb pointing towards the sky indicates something positive, along the lines of, “yes,” “okay,” “sounds good,” or any other indication of approval. However, that same gesture, across some West African and Middle Eastern countries (like Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan), that gesture is negatively connotated, equated with sticking your middle finger up at someone in the Unites States.
skillful and increases its forces” (Foucault 1995:136). As our bodies move through the world, we are partaking in processes that perpetuate force relations on the body, while at the same time we work against these exact processes through resistance and the utilization of our recognized (and unrecognized) bodily autonomy. That being said, Foucault shares how we have the potential to be agents of ‘indiscipline.’ This indiscipline consists of the body, grammar, tone, social relations of liberty, etcetera. Foucault argues that none of us lack agency, we just may lack the recognition of our agency to destabilize the contingent realities in which we live (Foucault, 1995: 279-290).

Foucault also introduces dispositifs, the French word for an apparatus. Apparatuses can be any institution, knowledge structure, or process in which power is central to its existence, as one of its purposes is to generate and exercise power. Foucault states, “by the term ‘apparatus’ I mean a kind of a formation, so to speak, that at a given historical moment has as its major function the response to an urgency. The apparatus therefore has a dominant strategic function” (Foucault, 1977). The apparatus is always connected to a power relation, thus is consequently linked to relations of knowledge. Surveillance and regulation (particularly of the body) are key to the functioning of the disciplinary institution of education. As Foucault states,

[It] made the educational space function like a learning machine, but also as a machine for supervising, hierarchizing, rewarding … the educational space unfolds; the class becomes homogeneous, it is no longer made up of individual elements arranged side by side under the master’s eye … ‘rank’ begins to define the great form of distribution of individuals in the education order: rows or ranks of pupils in the class, corridors, courtyards; rank attributed to each pupil at the end of each task and each examination … in this ensemble of compulsory alignments, each pupil, according to his age, his performance, his behaviour, occupies sometimes one rank, sometimes another … It is a perpetual movement in which individuals replace one another in a space marked off by aligned intervals (Foucault, 1995:147).

11 Through a Freirean lens, we may lack the critical consciousness needed to recognize this in order to then act with the recognition of our agency.
Learning machines regulate our behaviors and stifle the creative and imaginative processes which inherently make humans unique from any other life on earth. The disciplinary institution of education has the potential to encourage order and passivity; disciplining those who pass through it to be docile; rewarded for behaviors that perpetuate its own control while punishing behaviors which disrupt its functioning of power. This disruption must occur in space that the body occupies. Sue Middleton, author of *Disciplining Sexuality: Foucault, Life Histories, and Education*, explains that Foucault “Treats the space of the body as the irreducible element in our social scheme of things … the body exists in space and must either submit to authority or carve out particular spaces of resistance and freedom” (Middleton, 1998:116). Thus, educational spaces always have the potential to perpetuate both domination and/or liberation.

Finally, Foucault emphasized in an interview titled, “Truth, Power, Self” what he understood as a part of his purpose as an intellectual, “My role – and that is too emphatic a word – is to show people that they are much freer than they feel ... To change something in the minds of people – that is the role of the intellectual” (Foucault, 1982). We cannot individually or collectively strive for freedom without first recognizing the agency we possess. The power of the collective entity combined with disobedience creates an effervescence of unified agency, “bodies mingling together without respect, individuals...abandoning their statutory identity and the figure under which they had been recognized … compact groupings of individuals wandering about the country in unpredictable ways...agitations, revolts, spontaneous organizations, coalitions – anything that might establish horizontal conjunctions, popular illegalities” (Foucault, 1995:197, 219, 292). As bodies come together to resist and disrupt all that violently works to keep the order of things, inexplicable feelings of inspiration and liberation permeate the minds and souls of those who aspire to transform the world.
CRITICAL THINKING VS. CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

Originally, I thought that I was primarily curious about the teacher’s ability to inspire critical thinking (CT) within their students. However, through my own research and investigation, I realized that critical thinking (or critical reflection) was just a piece of the larger critical consciousness-raising (CCR) puzzle: it is an integral and necessary pillar supporting critical consciousness-raising. This section serves to make their relation to one another clear.

John Dewey, an American philosopher, psychologist, and educator, coined the term *critical thinking* and defined it by first defining its opposite, “If the suggestion that occurs is at once accepted, we have uncritical thinking, the minimum of reflection. To turn the thing over in mind, to reflect, to hunt for additional evidence, for new data … to maintain the state of doubt and carry on systematic and protracted inquiry – these are the essentials of [critical] thinking” (Dewey, 1910:13). Matthew Lipman, who is recognized as the founder of Philosophy of Children, parallels Dewey’s definition, stating it as a tool utilized “to protect us from being coerced or brainwashed into believing what others want us to believe without having an opportunity to inquire for ourselves” (Lipman, 2003:47). Critical thinking is a process in which one is in a constant state of questioning, broken free of wisping along the tides of normalcy, conformity, and familiarity. Although these definitions are substantive, Nada Alsaleh also asserts that, “it is important to note that no single definition of CT is applicable to every discipline at

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12 ‘doubt,’ as in, skepticism of Truths that tell us our lived realities are stagnant.
every level. Although researchers generally agree that CT is a high-level thinking skill, teachers’ experiences and goals, as well as students’ needs, determine the specific skills to be developed” (Alsaleh: 2020:22). Thus, rather than solely seeking to doubt and question, some propose CT to revolve around certainty, objectivity, and ultimately, ‘right answers.’ This is exemplified within both Okan Sarigoz’s and Daniel Willingham’s definitions:

“Critical thinking means that the individual features his/her such intellectual thinking skills as reasoning, analyzing, problem solving, reading comprehension, scientific thinking, creative thinking, judgement and deciding accurately” (Sarigoz, 2012:1).

“Critical thinking consists of seeing both sides of an issue, being open to new evidence that disconfirms your ideas, reasoning dispassionately, demanding that claims be backed by evidence, deducing and inferring conclusions from available facts, solving problems, and so forth” (Willingham, 2008:21).

I have underlined the parts that catch my eye – given that they support the claim that there exist universal Truths (in Foucauldian terms) to discover and name, embodying values of perfectionism and singular, objective ‘right answers’ perpetuated by White Supremacist culture. Lipman counters this understanding, paraphrasing Monroe Beardsley, an American philosopher of art,

Beardsley was more concerned with meaning than with truth, as befits someone immersed in the problems of aesthetic criticism. For this reason, he gave considerable attention to matters of translation, which were meaning-oriented, and not just to matters of inference, which were truth-oriented (Lipman, 2003:32-33).

Additionally, both Dewey and Lipman discuss the ways in which CT serves to challenge and resist authority. Dewey mirrors Freire’s conceptualization of covert education stating,

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13 I also want to note that my use of quotation marks here reminds me of an educator I had which called them ‘scare quotes’ – meaning that we put things into quotation marks when we informally don’t want to claim something as our own.
14 Okun, Tema. “White Supremacy Culture” (from www.dismantlingracism.org)
15 Freire’s differentiates between overt curriculum and hidden curriculum, stating that the former is this supposed universal understanding of core subjects (like math, science, history, and English), while the hidden curriculum posits that there is a teaching and acceptance of social rules, norms, traditions, and ideas – primarily concerned with maintaining the status quo, and ensuring that it is not radically disrupted. The scary thing is that this is often indirect and unnoticed (especially if students aren’t engaging with a critical consciousness).
“social conditions tend to instigate and confirm wrong habits of thinking by authority, by conscious instruction, and by the even more insidious half-conscious influence of language, imitation, sympathy, and suggestion” (Dewey, 1910:25). Therefore, CT could be a tool utilized to break down these ‘wrong habits,’ or rather, coerced habits, enforced by educators in their positions of authority. Similarly, Lipman quotes Robert Ennis, an educator and philosopher of education, who postulates that “Children are very much aware that certain acts are generally disapproved of and others are given social approval. They are also aware that the teacher carries moral authority, and they generally do not feel in a position to question that authority. This means that ethical inquiry, which involves a certain amount of thinking for oneself about moral issues, is very difficult to bring about in the classroom setting.” (Lipman, 2003:50). That is, difficult to bring about in the classroom setting if the authority figure isn’t aware of this assumed and real power, and able to utilize strategies to combat or destabilize their own said power in order to provide students opportunities to recognize ways in which they can continue to think and reflect critically.

Critical thinking is not synonymous, but very similar to, Freire’s conceptualization of critical reflection, which is a necessary element of critical consciousness-raising. There are two ways that I break down their differentiation in my mind. First, I think that critical thinking is more of the ‘in the moment’ raw and initial thoughts that spring up while first learning about something; this is the thinking that should have no limits or internal judgments, just letting your mind critically consider as many sides and perspectives surrounding a topic or situation as possible. On the other hand, critical reflection is more personal, allowing for one to really delve deep inside themselves, doing the internal work surrounding the topic and how they may personally be related to it. However, my mind worked its way down another avenue, which
argued that critical thinking and critical reflection are actually the same thing, given that once someone is critically thinking about it, they are already reflecting on it since the moment of learning has already passed and we are actually inevitably always thinking reflectively if it’s something that was introduced. Even if you connect what you learned to something about the future (which is common for social change and utilizing the imagination), one is still reflecting and then imagining, thus, critical thinking and critical reflection could arguably be one in the same. Nonetheless, critical consciousness-raising requires one to be able to critically think and reflect, while simultaneously understanding how their own identities and positionalities inform their relation to the world.

Paulo Freire originally coined the Portuguese term, conscientização (translated into English as, conscientization or consciousness-raising), which claims, “what is true today may not be so tomorrow” (Freire, 1973:44). Godfrey and Grayman define CRR as “the degree to which individuals are able to ‘read’ social conditions critically and feel empowered to act to change those conditions” (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014:1801). Thus, while critical reflection is the questioning aspect, critical consciousness-raising is the piece that empowers one to realize their own relation to the world, as well as act upon this recognition.16 Mary Styslinger succinctly describes the purpose of CCR,

Our critical consciousness increases as we come to perceive contradictions and oppressions in the world. We come to notice the difference between those who have and those who do not and ponder the reasons why. We come to notice incongruities and coercions in surrounding societal structures … Teachers for social justice … try to foster in students a sense of agency and capacity to interrupt and change oppressive patterns in themselves and in the world which surrounds them. In short, they teach by raising student consciousness and then trusting that students ‘will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond’ to the inequities and injustices they come to recognize and realize (Freire, 2014: 81). Agency and engagement are intrinsic to social justice teaching in a

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16 Not only this, but Godfrey and Grayman also go into depth about the positive effects the CRR can have on youth’s “mental health, occupational outcomes and civic development” (Godfrey and Grayman, 2014:1802).
democracy because as learners challenge individual and systemic forms of injustice, they also learn how to be active and engaged citizens (Styslinger, 2019:9).

If we aren’t first aware of problems or injustices, then why would we feel inspired to do something about them? Let’s say you were born with 20/30 vision, so you’re not completely visually impaired, but the world is definitely a little bit blurry. However, you don’t know what the world would look like with perfect eyesight since you’ve never seen it before and aren’t aware that you are slightly visually impaired. Thus, since you don’t even know that there is an impairment, and you aren’t motivated to go to the eye doctor and learn how to get a prescription to see more clearly. Otherwise, you’re just going to move through life with blurred vision, thinking that this is just the way the world looks.\(^{17}\)

\(^{17}\) I could take this analogy even further to say that not only are you unaware, but you also aren’t conversing in open dialogue about it. Let’s take the visual of a tree. If you aren’t asking someone, “When you look at that tree, do you see a sea of greens that kind blend and blur together?” and your friend isn’t responding, “No, actually I see distinct edges in the branches and leaves” then there’s also no way you’re going to come to the realization that you may need a visual aid. Thus, dialogue between people is integral to recognizing the need for change as well.
CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING TEACHING STRATEGIES

Although this is not an exhaustive list of teaching strategies that can be utilized to inspire critical consciousness-raising within high school students, throughout my research I’ve identified seven key components that various authors have discussed and recognized through their own research and experiences. These strategies include, but are not limited to: Teacher Reflexivity, Critical Reflection, Physical Layout of Classroom, Teaching as a Political Act, Seeing Student as a Whole Person/Human, Relevance to ‘Real Life’, and Engagement Outside of Class. It is also significant to note that these categories have fluid borders between them, as they relate and overlap across one another.

**Teacher Reflexivity**

*Teacher Reflexivity* simply refers to teachers constantly in reflection of their teaching practices and the ways in which their own intersecting identities inform them. As Sharon M. Chubbuck illustrates, this can be exemplified by,

…those who have engaged in a deep, profound, and, frequently, painful process of individual self-reflection to become holistically more just people; this process often requires a lifelong commitment. Just teaching practices inherently originate in a rigorous self-examination where personal biases and emotional responses are brought into the light of self-awareness, accompanied by a humility of heart that is willing to admit their presence and to do the work needed to address them productively (Chubbuck, 2010:203).

Although some aspects of one’s reflection are best to remain personal and private, Jesus Jaime-Diaz touches on the importance of transparency and vulnerability associated with such reflection stating that, “future teacher preparation must incorporate a self-reflexive methodology whereby a teacher/learner approach foments understanding about ourselves and others, in which teachers are immersed. The art of teaching must engage critical compassion, empathy, respeto, confianza, as paths to bridge difference toward critical consciousness. Race, racialized class, gender, and sexuality, among other interstitial spaces, must become central in the preparation of
those who desire to create a human connection in the schooling of others” (Jaime-Diaz, 2020:65). Teachers are simultaneously learning alongside their students, and in order to strive to understand others one must be able to dive into understanding oneself as well. Waller mirrors this, “As we learn more about ourselves by reflecting on our teaching and through continuing our education, our teaching philosophies continue to evolve, especially as we try to understand our students’ needs. Thus, as teachers, it is crucial that we determine and continuously reassess our own ideologies” (Waller et. al. 2017:17). Consciously placing effort towards reflection of one’s teaching day, week, year, etc. is integral in learning how to improve, and there are various strategies to do this.

One strategy includes normalizing the process. Chubbuck shared, “I tell my own story as a White woman engaged in an ongoing process of understanding the nature of racism, sexism, and classism in society and in myself” (Chubbuck, 2010:203). To one’s own comfortability, sharing aspects of one’s own identity and how it informs one’s worldview is essential, giving students both the understanding that the space is safe for vulnerability as well as potentially providing language to describe one’s relation to systems of oppression (i.e.: White Supremacy). Chubbuck’s second strategy involves receiving feedback. Some examples include conducting “peer observations” and to “analyze self-recorded classes” (Chubbuck 2010:17). Peer observations may include asking students to share insight or feedback regarding one’s teaching, such as what they think is working well, what they liked, what they didn’t like, etc., while they assert how, if you have the ability, you can record yourself teaching to reflect and learn from afterwards. Finally, Waller et. al. acknowledges the assumed and real power the teacher possesses as an authority figure, and some ways in which understanding that positionality is integral to fostering an environment that encourages critical consciousness-raising,
…teachers tend ‘to be thrown off by students’ unexpected questions and tend to view student initiations as off-task and a threat to their instructional control’ (p. 237). Here, many new teachers may feel their power and authority in the classroom contested by students’ questions. Instead of fearing these moments, Pennycook (2012) recommends that teachers embrace them. Referring to these instances as critical moments, he argues that unexpected questions asked of a teacher can be opportunities for learning and discussing difficult questions in the classroom (Waller et. al. 2017).

The normalized hierarchical nature of teacher-student relations should be disrupted in order to foster transformative lessons within the classroom space. Waller et. al. warns that teachers may feel threatened by students ‘challenging’ one’s authority through question-asking but should instead consider this to be an opportunity for growth and reciprocal understanding. In order to be a critical educator, Waller et. al. asserts that teachers must “let go of our power for the sake of our practice. This does not mean that we give up control of a class; instead, it means (1) letting go of preconceived notions of what an ideal lesson plan should be and (2) being open to the teachable moments where the classroom can become a site of change that generates unlimited possibilities for learning” (Waller et. al., 2017). As mentioned previously, it is important for students to recognize that, as their teacher, you are learning with them, which includes reflecting on and destabilizing your authority, and delving into moments that bring you discomfort (such as students challenging you through asking questions!).

Critical Reflection

While Teacher Reflexivity is more specific to the teacher, Critical Reflection is something both teachers and students can partake in, individually and collectively. Critical Reflection can be described as the moment(s) in which one is motivated (either by themselves or others) to question. Jaime-Diaz expresses,

To counter social reproduction within the art of teaching, those who teach must revisit their early socialization, while simultaneously taking account of what is the most sacred for those who aim to become agents of change. This calls for an interrogation of traditional socialization, which is not limited to legacies of religion, family,
immigration/migration histories, and education. It also implicates unpacking the trauma associated with the realities of our human experience. Through what Méndez-Negrete (2013b) calls ‘pedagogical conocimientos,’ teachers engage self and other in interaction, as they participate in a collaborative and collective process of knowledge creation (Jaime-Díaz, 2020:65).

Thus, Critical Reflection is a process in which the student(s) and teacher create together—through questioning, wondering, and imagining (i.e.: understanding and reflecting on how they operate within larger social systems). Styslinger et. al. offer some strategies to encourage Critical Reflection within her students. The first involves quite literally verbalizing that Critical Reflection is a process that you want your students to engage with, stating the beginning starts with challenging students to “reflect critically on their beliefs and the sources of these beliefs” (Styslinger et al., 2019:13). Transparency is necessary. Next, they suggested a “Privilege Walk.” This consists of students either standing in a line or a circle and the teacher saying different privileged identities or backgrounds. If a student possesses it, they take a step forward.

Finally, Styslinger et. al. believe that ‘critical reader response journals’ are helpful, stating that “students respond to what they have read, recording initial thoughts and feelings elicited by the text. However, reading and responding alone does not challenge students to think critically, which is why the second step is to examine initial responses for their social and cultural influences” (Styslinger et. al., 2019:10). Here, Styslinger et. al. argue that if students have the opportunity to journal for themselves, it may encourage them to digest the material personally (how they intrinsically felt about it), but states that the most important thing is reflecting on how their own identities/backgrounds/positionalities inform their responses. Ultimately, Critical Reflection is a practice that students and teachers can partake in both individually and collectively, creating a space of intentional growth through reflection.
Physical Layout and Climate

I also found that the physical orientation or layout of a classroom is extremely significant when considering how to encourage critical consciousness-raising within one’s students. While educators are influencing their students’ minds, it is evident that students’ physical body can be manipulated and controlled as well. That being said, the teacher should be intentional in how they arrange the classroom, particularly the students’ desks,

According to Bloome, it is what a teacher does with classroom desks that is important. Thus, the way teachers organize their classroom furniture is a reflection of their conscious attention (or lack of attention) to their teaching philosophies. Having the students sit in a U-shaped formation or move their desks into small circles seems to be the best way to promote group work and feelings of inclusion for the classroom community, which in turn can foster motivation, greater respect for each other, and cross-cultural communication (Waller et. al., 2017:10).

Sosa-Provencio et. al. parallels Waller et. al., arguing that the teacher should “enact schooling as decolonization, empowerment” and that the classroom manifestation of this involves an educator organizing their classroom “to counter a schooling paradigm of assimilation, body control, and silencing while engaging students in shaping a more just, peaceful world” (Sosa-Provencio et. al., 2020:351). Sosa-Provencio et. al. also asserts that it is imperative that educators focus on “centering marginalized communities’ and students’ perspectives, contributions, minds, bodies, spirits, needs, and desires shapes teaching and learning as decolonization and empowerment so that youth and educators across culture may build transferable, real-world knowledge and multiliteracies which strengthen communicational tools of agency” (Sosa-Provencio et. al., 2020:351). Erin Godfrey and Justina Grayman (2014) advocate for a similar classroom
arrangement, specifically called an “open classroom climate.” Throughout their study, they found that an open classroom climate “—one that promoted the discussion of controversial issues and respect for diverse opinions—was related to some, but not all, components of youth’s critical consciousness” (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014:1811). Both Sosa-Provencio et. al. (2020) and Godfrey & Grayman (2014) indicate that uplifting historically marginalized and silenced voices (may that be across race, gender, class, ability, sexual orientation, etc.) promotes dialogue across differences, which ultimately increased the likelihood of students utilizing their critical consciousness. However, Godfrey & Grayman go on to say that they believe that schools, if possible, should highly consider trainings for teachers to gain skills to develop an open classroom climate. They state that their results,

suggest that an open classroom climate may not only foster these skills, but also influence critical consciousness development. Thus, schools should consider trainings and other interventions to develop teachers’ ability to create an open classroom climate that fosters dialogue and respects multiple perspectives and opinions. Our results further suggest that the transition to high school, when students are cognitively ready to process abstract ideas and are developing a sense of personal and civic identity, may be a key time to implement such trainings and interventions (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014:1815).

Thus, it is imperative that teachers are intentional and conscious of the ways in which the layout of the classroom influences the interactions and experiences of their students. If not considerate, a poor layout could lessen the chances of authentic communication and relations across differences, encouraging a climate of docile and unengaged learners.

**Teaching as a Political Act**

Like Freire, Jaime-Diaz argues that “Critical pedagogues offer that teaching is a political act and not an objective one where content is solely delivered” (Jaime-Diaz, 2020:52). As much as one can try, teachers cannot and do not enter the classroom space as an objective being. Some teachers believe that withholding some aspects of their own values or political stances is
beneficial to the learning environment, while others believe that sharing one’s personal perspectives or opinions is a necessity in the growth of students. Combining both stances, Waller et. al. states that “Praxis is all about balance, how teachers define their beliefs and the theories they have learned, and how they implement these beliefs and theories through their instruction. An imbalance or contradiction between what the teacher believes and what he or she does in the classroom can potentially result in a praxis breakdown” (Waller et. al., 2017:19). Jaime-Diaz furthers this point, positing that “Future teachers must recognize that social transformation will not come by changing the schools, but by cultivating an education that is politicized and simultaneously unlinked to the status quo. Change will only come when society transforms the systemic apparatus of schooling into an organic social movement that shares its struggle with the working-class experience” (Jaime-Diaz, 2020:64). One must recognize that norms of racism, sexism, classism, ableism, etc. already permeate educational institutions, thus, not disrupting such forms of oppression is in and of itself also a political act (inaction). Thus, the classroom is a political atmosphere in which the teacher has the power and opportunity to create and foster dialogue amongst students which brings to light said social issues and how they understand their own relation to them. Similarly, Sosa-Provencio et. al. argues that Body-Soul Rooted Pedagogy is an avenue and practice that teachers can utilize. It claims,

…teaching is the political act of recognizing that schooling has systematized inequity and teaching all populations through colorblindness and political neutrality perpetuates this inequity … Body-Soul Rooted Pedagogy acknowledges the political nature of knowing and historicizes schooling within larger dynamics of power and privilege. Educators may embody Body-Soul Rootedness by recognizing that all youth experience schooling through its accumulated history in their communities (Martinez, 2010; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) and that marginalized youth’s resistance to school is often unexamined alienation met with punishment and neglect (Sosa-Provencio, 2020:350).

We are all entering the classroom with intersecting identities that impact how we are perceived and treated by others and society at large. The lives of one’s students are not politically neutral,
so teaching should not try to treat them as such. *Body-Soul Rooted Pedagogy* prioritizes encourages students to learn through “tangible and reciprocal relationships with knowledge, themselves, their bodies, peers, families, teachers, and locally global communities” (Sosa-Provencio, 2020:351). It asserts that all are interconnected, which should be not only acknowledged but prioritized and understood.

One way in which a teacher can influence the climate of the classroom is intentionally choosing materials and texts that offer a wide and diverse array of perspective and experience. Some strategies to construct education as a political act include Styslinger et. al.’s ‘windows, mirrors, and doors’ analogy relative to critically analyzing and understanding texts:

**WINDOWS**

“Sometimes books offer windows … through which students view familiar and less familiar worlds”

**DOORS**

“Windows can also be sliding glass doors through which readers walk and become part of an author’s realm”

**MIRRORS**

“And every so often, when the light is just right, a window becomes a mirror, and magically, readers see their own lives and experiences reflected in the lives and experiences of others. Social justice teachers purposefully select texts that allow students to see themselves and others”

(Styslinger et. al., 2019:11).

Each increasing in empathy and shared experience, Styslinger et. al. exemplify how materials and texts have the potential to relate to students’ lived experiences which can foster transformational conversations and dialogue across intersections of oppression and privilege. If anxiety or discomfort arises, expressing one’s thoughts through the lens of the material can increase student participation since they may relate to the character and can then express their
thoughts through the eyes of them, rather than share through themselves. This relates to another tool that teachers can utilize, which are the comfort, growth, and panic zones. Although teachers and students being vulnerable can be beneficial, it’s important to implement strategies where students can challenge themselves by choice. Here is a visual of the comfort, growth, and panic zones:

Remaining in the comfort zone mitigates the chances of one engaging their critical consciousness, while entering the growth zone there is a high chance, and the panic zone is also unlikely since students are likely to be too uncomfortable and shut down. Being observant and open about this process, as well as how you relate to it, can be helpful.

**Seeing Student as a Whole Person**

Students enter the classroom as whole, human beings with complex experiences, histories, perspectives, assumptions, biases, and more. To attempt to teach with intentional (or unintentional) blindness to all other identities apart from ‘student’ is limiting and a form of erasure. Waller et. al. asserts how potentially dangerous this is, emphasizing that, letting assumptions be the only information we know about our students can be damaging, thus it is important to remember that not all students from a given culture will encounter the same problems or behave the same way. As each of our students is influenced by a plethora of experiences that are specific to their individual selves, we must also try to learn about these aspects of our students (Waller et. al., 2017:13).

Jaime-Diaz offers a framework to practice this, *critical compassion*: “they must be mindful about their students’ lived experiences. To carry out their practice, teachers must rely on
their emotions as sources of connection, to engage and examine interactions with their students” (Jaime-Diaz, 2020:59). In order to understand one’s students as whole humans, the teacher must also practice recognizing themselves as full teachers as well (through reciprocal reflection and vulnerability). This requires the teacher to understand their students as both individuals as members of a larger community and society, and how those positions interact,

The teacher who analyzes the child’s learning experience through both an individual and a structural orientation will be better equipped to supply the support and instruction that the child needs individually and to begin to redress the effects of and transform the realities of educational and societal structures that perpetuate learning inequity. This richer, more nuanced understanding of the student’s needs, based on the interactive nature of both individual and structural experiences, can support the development and application of a richer repertoire of curricular, pedagogical, and policy responses to address the child’s needs (Chubbuck, 2010:202).

Chubbuck indicates that the development of equity pedagogy is critical in that it takes into consideration students’ “membership in sociocultural groups” and posits cultural difference as a strength rather than a deficit to learning, taking “appreciation for the ‘funds of knowledge available to students,’ families, and communities … [it] utilizes instructional methods that build on the cultural knowledge, norms, and communicative practices of students” (Chubbuck, 2010:205). With this acknowledgement and understanding, Sosa-Provencio et. al. takes it a step further to state that it is not enough to solely recognize difference in experience, but to also “design pedagogy as a salve which may remedy these wounds through wholeness of mind, body, and spirit” (Sosa-Provencio, 2020:347). The practice of teaching is an opportunity to heal for both the individual and collective. Sosa-Provencio quotes Gloria Ladson-Billings, “For the diverse inheritors of these traumas accumulated over centuries, a gross educational debt remains whose interest is compounded by silence (Ladson-Billings, 2006)” (Sosa-Provencio, 2020:347). Looking away or dodging the lived realities of one’s students is ‘compounded’ trauma and
should not be avoided or brushed off. Fostering spaces in which students feel comfortable to share their own experiences is essential to raise one’s critical consciousness.

Sosa-Provencio et. al. also exemplify how educators can be healers, engendering hope, healing and well-being. Educators can encourage this through “collaboration, deep inquiry, mind/body/spirit health, and joy in learning and growing” (Sosa-Provencio et. al., 2020:354). An example of this may look like schools or teachers creating spaces in which all members can connect through sharing their experiences and stories, which Sosa-Provencio et. al. call a healing circle. These can encourage a “tangible-transcendent pedagogy of connectedness, curiosity, joy, critical consciousness, and agency” (Sosa-Provencio, 2020:349). Further, healing circles acknowledge the prevalence of trauma and how through our intersecting and overlapping identities we are simultaneously different and connected. Sosa-Provencio et. al. concludes by sharing that “this work aims to sculpt a similar wholeness through a corporeal, soulful pedagogy which may provide especially marginalized youth vehicles of creation, resistance, and healing” (Sosa-Provencio, 2020:356). This relates to hooks’ notion that while teachers should not be synonymous to therapists, they still hold a responsibility with respect to acknowledging and remaining critically aware of their students as entire beings with overlapping and intersecting identities and experiences.

Relevance to ‘Real Life’

Styslinger et. al. express that teachers should strive to make the world their students’ classroom (Styslinger et. al., 2019:13). One of the most significant contributors toward raising students’ critical consciousness is whether the material they are encounter and interact with is something that they can connect to on a personal level (either through their own experiences or through striving to understand others’). Much like Freire’s Banking Method of Education,
Lipman postulates that oftentimes, “education is disposable, like a paper cup – something you acquire for only as long as you need it and throw away when you are done with it. The knowledge one gets in the schools, students feel, is not relevant to life; it is relevant only to the tests that bar one from entering or permit one to enter life. Once a test has been taken, the knowledge needed for it can be forgotten with no more regret than one has in throwing away the paper cup” (Lipman, 2003:29). Education and learning are frequently perceived as merely a box to check off in order to get to the next step (whether that be honors classes, scholarships, college admission, etc.), forcing students to constantly live in the future, and participate in a vicious cycle permeated by fear-based motivation.

In order to mitigate this type of educational experience, Syamsul Arifin et. al. mirrors Freire’s Problem Posing Education Method, suggesting a Problem Based Learning (PBL) Model which prioritizes focusing on “real-world problems as a context for students to learn critically and problem-solving skills and gaining knowledge” (Arifin et. al., 2020:272). Students are far more likely to be engaged, curious, and ultimately care if the content is relevant to their lives. Chubbuck (2010) also posits that “Students need curricular content that is reflective of their experience … they need to explore curriculum that allows them to discover their own power to deconstruct oppressive systems and to envision possible futures previously unimagined” (Chubbuck, 2010:205). Chubbuck mirrors (pun unintended) Styslinger et. al.’s analogy of teachers understanding the curriculum as a mirror, a tool kit, and a window:

**MIRROR**

“…uses ‘students’ lives as critical texts,’ where both the texts and the products of the class are centered on students’ experiences and communities”\(^1\)

\(^1\) Chubbuck provides an example, stating that “Poet Adrienne Rich (1986) captures this in her statement: When those who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you, whether you
TOOL KIT

“Curriculum also needs to function as a tool kit for students, offering each of them individual access to the high-status knowledge and skills that serve as gatekeepers to levels of higher learning and professional success”

WINDOW

“…students need a curriculum that provides a window into a present and a future they may not have imagined for themselves. These may be new academic and professional trajectories that have not readily been in their vision … the window will engage students in exploration of their own agency as they learn to ‘see that history is not inevitable, that there are spaces where it can bend, change, and become more just’ (Christensen, 2009) and that they can become actors in that process. Curriculum as a window will help students see that they are capable of becoming proactive subjects, not passive objects, in the processes of history (Freire, 1970); they are capable of becoming ‘justice-oriented citizens’ (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) … curriculum as window leads students to problem-posing the ordinary” (Chubbuck, 2010:205-206).

Utilizing the mirror, tool kit, and window analogy, teachers can intentionally structure their curriculum to foster reflection amongst students in which they are encouraged to understand the material as reflective in their own experiences (mirror), to utilize the material in a way that pushes them to take advantage of outside resources (tool kit) (i.e.: engaging within the capitalist system and structure), and finally, and arguably most importantly, to spark their imagination.

Sosa-Provencio et. al. also posits that educators should be transparent about the permeation of White Supremacy and other systems of oppression. This may be practiced by educators “reflecting everyday lives, worldviews, languages/dialects, histories, and intellectual and resistance legacies of especially marginalized People(s) across identity” (Sosa-Provencio et. al.).

are dark-skinned, old, disabled, female, or speak with a different accent or dialect than theirs, when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing” (Chubbuck, 2010:205).
Additionally, educators should “teach students to look outside themselves for knowledge (Hooks, 1994) … [building] curriculum around students’ community knowledge to grow resilient, agentive, community-connected youth” (Sosa-Provencio, 2020:353). Ultimately, students possess lived experiences that should be openly communicated while also connected to materials and curricula in order to support their critical consciousness-raising.

Finally, Waller et. al. also posits the significance of Dialogic Engagement, which asserts that “lessons can be created with tasks that require students to actively participate and to solve problems through collaboration” (Waller et. al., 2017:14). Dialogic Engagement prioritizes building community through authentic, open, and vulnerable dialogue and communication. Waller et. al. mirrors Freir, expressing that through “implementing practices that validate students’ lived realities (i.e., their everyday lives outside of school) in our classrooms, we find that students become more involved in their learning because they are not just receiving information from the teacher but sharing their own experiences as well” (Waller et. al., 2017:15). This reciprocal engagement between teacher and student, and well as student and student, is critical. What might this look like in praxis, you ask? Beaumont (2010) “used activities that require students to express their opinions, make inferences from readings, survey others about their thoughts, and eventually synthesize all of the information and propose solutions” (Waller et. al., 2017:15). Through this implementation, Beaumont argues that the communication skills of students improve, awareness of current events and issues is heightened, and their understanding of the relationship between their interesting identities and the surrounding environments and communities is improved as well.
Finally, taking what is learned within the learning environment and actively participating in social change outside the classroom is foundational in raising students’ critical consciousness, as well as continuing the cycle of reflection of one’s own positionality within the world, as both the student and the world is everchanging. John Beaumont, professor of Developmental Skills and ESL at Borough of Manhattan Community College, emphasizes that he strives for his “students not only to practice these skills in the classroom but to take them out into the world and use them” (Beaumont, 2010:430). Sosa-Provencio et. al. concurs, arguing that it is integral that students learn how to engage with their broader community “toward social equity” (Sosa-Provencio, 2020:354). They push for Social Action Pedagogy, wherein the “embodied, spiritual, and historical connectedness of Body-Soul Rooted Pedagogy infuses life into schooling paradigms deadened by top-down transfer of decontextualized facts and concepts” (Sosa-Provencio, 2020:354). In this way, education is de-abstraced from ‘real life,’ and transformed into a part of ‘real life’ – collapsing fragmented notions of school and life.

While Beaumont and Sosa-Provencio et. al. focus on the students’ engagement outside of class, Chubbuck narrows their focus in on their importance of teacher involvement and activism, arguing that all teachers are on a ‘continuum of work,’ “At one end of the continuum are private, individual acts of mercy or service to meet the needs of each individual child. At the other are collective, public acts of advocacy and reform to address inequitable structures and policies. Though a binary, either–or depiction of anything is inherently flawed, this continuum, with all the points along the way, helps students reflect on their personal strengths and limitations” (Chubbuck, 2010:207).¹⁹ This is extremely important. Oftentimes, it’s easy to slip into a

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¹⁹ Chubbuck goes on to illuminate how there exists private and public changemaking, “One [teacher] will stand before the school board to argue for policy revisions; another will kneel to explain fractions to a struggling student.
‘wokeness’ competition with one’s fellow teachers, administrators, faculty, and even students. While communicating one’s experience and position is most definitely necessary and significant towards raising critical consciousness, it is simultaneously important to recognize that it is ignorant and unproductive to think that ‘your’ fight towards a more just world is more significant just because ‘their’ fight looks different than yours. As educators interested in raising student critical consciousness, it’s important to remember that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice” (King, 1968). Thus, no matter what that road looks like to each teacher, “Wherever societal policies and practices oppress students, limiting their life opportunities and, consequently, the quality of their learning experience, socially just teachers are called to act as advocates and activists, seeking reform to redress the inequity” (Chubbuck, 2020:207). That being said, if possible, teachers should not refrain from getting their students to engage with communities outside of the classroom.

**Some ‘Gaps’ in the Current Literature**

I want to remain transparent and express that I cannot claim to know all of the gaps that exist within the current literature associated with critical consciousness-raising in high school students. However, I can assert my own understanding of what ‘gaps’ in the literature exist relative to the literature that I read and reflected upon.

There is no strict formula to teaching; it is an art that embodies nuance, humanization, and magic. My project contributes to the literature I read in that it humbly asserts that there isn’t a

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These teachers are not operating in opposition to each other; their efforts for justice are complementary. A commonly envisioned and mutually supported effort, expressed through each individual’s gifts in both structural and individual manifestations, is critical to the task before us because no aspect of socially just teaching is ‘an individual effort’ (Christensen, 2009, p. 9). We cannot afford to siphon energies into mistrust and argument over the meaning of social justice when we need the different gifting each teacher brings to the pursuit of justice. All our efforts and the shared validation of all are necessary for success” (Chubbuck, 2020:207).

20 The words “your” and “their” are in quotation marks because what ultimately should be realized is that it’s likely to be the same fight (for a more just world) – just practiced or centered on specific issues that differ.
one and done answer. This project began with my own curiosity of, “what is that indescribable magic? What is that ‘thing’ that you can’t describe when a teacher inspires you?” I found strategies to encourage the possibility of that magic happening, but to be completely honest, it is possible that one could implement all of those strategies (and more) and that magic won’t happen. Thus, these are ideas, even suggestions if you want to take them, but they are not definitive, and I want my contribution to acknowledge this.

This project contributes to the current literature through the addition of raw and authentic voices, exemplified through anecdotes, experiences, and stories never before documented from ten influential and inspiring educators. I am honored to have gotten the opportunity to learn from them and am so excited that you can too. Every day sparks are going off in educators’ minds that can be added to this literature, I’ve only captured a small fraction of that magic.

I am also contributing to the literature through my creation of the word inspiragination. Although inspiragination still doesn’t suffice, it’s the closest word I can think of to explain how this person impacted me: they inspired me to imagine, and that is one of the most profound and liberating things I think one can experience. As Lipman shares, “Without experience, imagination is likely to become quickly irrelevant, and without imagination, experience readily becomes tedious and pedestrian. In combination, however, as they are in metaphors and analogies, they can open up unsuspected ranges of alternative possibilities” (Lipman, 2003:60). Inspiragination is contingent and everchanging, thus it occurs in various ways and forms, causing this project to be one of instability in essence. Teachers are not replicative machines. There are no hard lines or definitive conclusions, but rather ideas and suggestions one can understand, utilize, and bloom into their own teaching magic. I believe that my project serves to concisely present some specific strategies to encourage critical consciousness-raising within high
school students that were not discussed within the literature I found. I also believe that although there are patterns and similarities across teaching strategies, each teacher has their own informed experience that is valuable and informative. Finally, I hope that my contribution potentially encourages reflection on your own teaching strategies (if you are an educator), or even just as a human being, because we are all connected and all have unique experiences to share and learn from together. Through this collective imagination, we have the agency and power to greatly transform the world.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Throughout this chapter I discuss the methodology utilized to complete this project. My primary source of analysis and understanding consists of 10 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with various high school teachers within the United States. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were gathered through convenience sampling (many were referred to me through my own personal networks) as well as through snowball sampling (one participant was referred to me through a previous participant). The interviews conducted aimed to gather strategies that the participants utilize to encourage critical conscious-raising within their students. The interviews were either audio-recorded (phone-call) or audio-visually recorded (Zoom) and transcribed with Otter.ai, a transcription software.

Participant Background Information

Below I’ve included a table which provides the names (some are pseudonyms, otherwise they told me what they would like me to refer to them as), genders, races/ethnicities (some gave only race, some both race and ethnicity), and ages (either young adult, middle-aged adult, or senior) of the 10 participants. Following the table, I’ve consolidated some background information, including some of their educational background, how long they’ve taught at the high school level, what subjects they’ve taught/teach, and an anecdote of what inspired their journey to teaching and education in general. The participants are in order of interview date.

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Layton</th>
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<th>Jean-Paul</th>
<th>Madden</th>
<th>Uitvlugt</th>
<th>Katie</th>
<th>Mara</th>
<th>Charlene</th>
<th>Mia</th>
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<td>White and Korean/ German</td>
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<tr>
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LAYTON

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND: Got his B.A. from Evergreen State College.

HAS TAUGHT HIGH SCHOOL FOR: Taught High School for 35 years (retired now).

SUBJECTS TAUGHT/TEACHING: Taught a range of subjects from, Physical Education, Woodshop, to Geography – had a certificate that was called the “All Encompassing Certificate of Education” but nicknamed it the “Golden Certificate” because you could legally teach anything. Ultimately, landed on literature, “because I like to teach through stories. And I found that it matched how I think we think.”

BECAME TEACHER BECAUSE: “I grew up in a small farm town in eastern Washington. And we had more agriculture teachers than we did English teachers. Only one out of five of my classmates went to college. So, it was it wasn’t anti-intellectual, but it was just anti school. And so, when you found a teacher there, who was inspiring, it was stunning. And I had one and he was brilliant. And I guess to remember, when I was a senior, he and his family decided to move to Seattle area. And so, he resigned after four years in our in our high school, and as the protocol was, he appeared before the school board for an exit interview. And they asked them, said ‘Mr. S, if, if you have any suggestions of how we can improve the high school, could you let us know?’ And he smiled and said, ‘Yes, on Monday, have all the students lined up on the south side of the building, and tell them to push very hard.’ He was always certainly full of himself. But he was, again, one who believe that learning isn’t memorizing. And then the last one was when I was at the visiting my grandparents in Seattle, I went out to the new district and went to their bookstore. And here was this book on a shelf and I had to buy it. And it was called Teaching: How to Corrupt America’s Youth. I was committed to that activity.”

CONE

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND: Got his B.A. from UCLA. He studied Political Science and graduated in 1993. He got his master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction from University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1999. He got his teaching certification program at Dominican College in 2000.

HAS TAUGHT HIGH SCHOOL FOR: This is his 20th year teaching (started in 2001).

SUBJECTS TAUGHT/TEACHING: He has always taught social studies.

BECAME TEACHER BECAUSE: “Yeah, so, you know, my parents were both in education. My mom was a teacher, my dad was a teacher for a little while, then a principal and superintendent. So, I actually didn’t want to do that. That was pretty boring. Like you know, every night they would talk about the same stuff. So, I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do and to make a really long story short, I went to Wisconsin, and I was going to get a master’s in Journalism, and I thought I wanted to be a journalist. And that came from when I was about 25, I took an 11-month trip around the world, and I met so few people from the U.S., and I was very angry. Like, how can a country with such influence not produce people who are more curious about the world? And so, I did a lot of reading. And I would say for me, somebody who was a huge influence on me was a professor named Edward Said. And his work really was very influential to me in terms of thinking about how do we talk about other people in other parts of the world, and
when/why do we always tend to do it in ways that flatter ourselves, maybe distort reality? So then, I went
to Wisconsin, I realized in two weeks, I’d screwed up. I was like, I don’t want to do this. I went to my
advisor, I said, ‘What do I do?’ and she said, ‘you know, you might, you might think about teaching,
because in teaching, you can tell stories about the rest of the world too.’ So, I went, and I audited a class
by a woman named Gloria Ladson-Billings. She’s like a real big superstar in education, but I didn’t know
any of that at the time. And I loved her class, and then it seemed like, you know, this might be an
interesting pathway. So, it was not super linear, in my case … I’ll just say one quick thing. She knew me
when I was 24 or 25, and I was pretty lost. I really didn’t know what I wanted to do. And so, I always
hold on to that notion of as a teacher, you sometimes have to see things in students that they don’t see in
themselves, right. Like you have to be able to see a potential so that I hopefully that’s like, kind of a force
that humbles you as a teacher to think like, ‘Well, shit, somebody did that for me once. You know, why
can’t I do it for others?’”

LEWIS

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND: He got his B.A. from University of Oregon (Race, Class, and
Ethnic Perspectives and Social Work & Sociology, with a minor in Mathematics). He then got his
master’s in Education from the University of Washington with an emphasis in grades 6-12 mathematics
instruction.

HAS TAUGHT HIGH SCHOOL FOR: He has been teaching at the high school level for 25 years.

SUBJECTS TAUGHT/TEACHING: He has taught a wide range, from pre-algebra to calculus, but the
last 20 years has been primarily statistics.

BECAME TEACHER BECAUSE: “I never thought I’d be a teacher… did not grow up thinking I’d be
a teacher. My dad was a principal and inner-city school in Washington DC, I had zero interest in going
into education so the, the only reason that led me there was I always wanted to do Peace Corps, and with
my skill set and with my background I was a civil engineer or student for two years so I had all this math,
so my background for the course-load that I took, they were in a huge need for math teachers so because I
had the ability to understand and communicate mathematics, I thought I would just try it to be able to
experience Peace Corps. Little did I know that it would just take me on this whole career path so, it was
more a backdoor entry into education, where I wanted to go to South Africa and experience different
cultures and histories and language and how to live, you know in a mud hut, and wanted to experience
Peace Corps during the 1990s, when it was, you know Apartheid was crumbling and there’s new elections
and, again, little did I know it was, it was the hook that got me sold on education, the career.”

JEAN-PAUL

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND: He got his bachelor’s degree from Berklee College of Music,
where he studied music as his primary major. He also studied education as a part of that from Harvard
University (specifically education, philosophy, and pedagogy). He got his credential in California from
UC San Diego, where he did level one, two, and three teaching techniques and supervisory practices and
pedagogical strategies. He got his admin credential from National University and his doctorate from the Mary Lou Fulton’s Teacher’s College at Arizona State.

HAS TAUGHT HIGH SCHOOL FOR: He has taught elementary, middle and high, and in university, he currently teaches doctoral level students.

SUBJECTS TAUGHT/TEACHING: He has taught a variety of subjects, ranging from music education to career technical education, including backgrounds in business, in sales and service and in arts, media and entertainment. He taught literature support classes and signified that more importantly, he spent most of his time as a high school teacher helping teams in a subject called ‘integrated academics’ where they would take four or five academic subjects and coordinate their activities together across platforms.

BECAME TEACHER BECAUSE: “Well, I don’t think I have a great story of that. I got into it for the money. I needed a job, and I had a background as a teacher’s assistant, and when I was in college, there was an opportunity for a part time teaching assignment with a with a Catholic school. And, you know, I was working at night, and I was going to school, and I still needed money, and I got the job as a part time teacher at the elementary school. So, I got into it for that reason, which is like, not what most people say. It is what it is. But what kept me in teaching was an education philosophy class, taught by one of our professors from Harvard, and the entire semester, was a deep dive into Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed, which to this day sits right next to me. It sits right here, and I review it every three years, I reread it. It had such a profound impact on me. And it was understanding the various modes and methods of how education works, inside of social systems, and what it can do, that really started driving me to do things and I didn’t start in my next assignment after college, I didn’t stay at elementary and I didn’t go to middle or high, I actually went, I went to Czechoslovakia, and I taught in their university system for several years, right when communism was ending. And I got to witness first-hand what oppressive education systems look like at their most extreme and how to rebuild them, and how you can design education systems as a means of liberation for people and how they support democracies.

MADDEN

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND: He got his bachelor’s degree from the University of Maine and got his master’s degree from the University of Rhode Island, which is where he got all of his teaching credentials.

HAS TAUGHT HIGH SCHOOL FOR: He has taught at the high school level for more than 30 years.

SUBJECTS TAUGHT/TEACHING: He is currently teaching history classes.

BECAME TEACHER BECAUSE: “I think when I was actually a really young kid, when I was like eight or nine or ten or something like that, I thought it would be really fun to just to be like a gym teacher. But I always had that sort of in my mind in terms of doing and working with kids but growing up in sort of a business-oriented family. Even though, I probably should have gone into education right away, when I first started studying in college, I studied like business… Business and Economics.”
UITVLUGT

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND: He got his bachelor’s degree at Lake Superior State University in Michigan and got his bachelor’s degree in Natural Resources and Parks and Recreation Management. He then went to the University of Washington to get his master’s degree in teaching and proceeded to get his credentials from a teaching certification program there.

HAS TAUGHT HIGH SCHOOL FOR: He has taught at the high school level for 11 years.

SUBJECTS TAUGHT/TEACHING: He teaches AP Environmental Science.

BECAME TEACHER BECAUSE: “I think looking back on it, I had a teacher in high school that I don’t think, at the time, like I didn’t go to my undergrad to like go and become a teacher. I did that kind of after the fact. So, I did my undergrad, and then I did Peace Corps, and then I actually was teaching in an environmental learning center, and I think that’s really what kind of sparked my desire to become a teacher. I was working with elementary age students who would come, and we would do environmental education with them. So, I wasn’t a classroom teacher, but I think that really kind of got the idea in my head that, ‘oh, yeah, I could be a teacher.’ But looking back, I had a teacher in high school that I kind of now, you know, realize that I kind of modeled myself off of, he’s very focused on you know, student relationships, and you know, just kind of making content real for students and applicable and really focused in on, you know, why we’re learning and not just, you know, what’s learned. But really like how, you know, real life is kind of, the classroom is real life, you can be doing valuable things in the classroom, and it’s not just like, ‘Oh, yeah, once you are in the real world, you’ll do stuff.’ So yeah, I think looking back, I kind of took a little bit of a roundabout path to get to actually be in the classroom and teaching.”

KATIE

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND: She went to Lewis and Clark in Portland and got a bachelor’s degree in history. She then went to the University of Colorado at Boulder and did a master’s degree in education.

HAS TAUGHT HIGH SCHOOL FOR: This is her 23rd year at the high school level, but also taught a variety of subjects 2 years before that at a charter school in Denver, Colorado.

SUBJECTS TAUGHT/TEACHING: She currently teaches Humanities and Academic Workshop (workshop for non-special education students that are failing classes).

BECAME TEACHER BECAUSE: “When I went to Lewis and Clark, I ended up being a history major, just out of pure love and interest I think I thought I was going to be an International Studies major or something like that but, I loved my history classes so, I became a history major and at the time, it I think there wasn’t a lot of pressure in the 90s to, or the 80s to pick a major and everyone was becoming a lawyer so humanities were good. That was a good thing to do. So, yeah, I became a history major, and I took a couple years off after undergrad, and it just became clear, like I needed to find a career and I still loved history. So, it became, ‘Are you gonna go to grad school or are you going to become a public-
school teacher?” and it just seemed practical, it was really in some ways a practical choice. But I think
once I decided to become a teacher I could kind of like, connect the dots back in my life to things that I
had done where I had worked with kids. I’ve been a camp counselor for three years, you know, and there
were a lot of choices I could see where I enjoyed working with young people and I had wanted to do a job
that was sort of somewhat service oriented. And I just enjoyed the content, so it was sort of like, although
it was practical, it also fit with things that I’d been interested in doing so, the decision was practical, but
then I think I later was like, ‘This is my calling. This is a real thing.’ Yeah, and then I was just lucky I
went to the University of Colorado just because I happen to live in Boulder at the time, and it was a
perfect match for me, and it was a two-year program, so I feel like I got to dig into education. I mean it
just, it was one of those things where everything came together, they did it in a cohort. And the cohort I
was with was amazing, they were so passionate, and we had a class called, I think was called
“Foundations of Education” or something which is kind of I think the idea was that it was sort of a history
of what is the purpose of education or something. And somehow that cohort was the perfect group of
people who just got so into why we were doing what we were doing, and we had a professor who just
clicked with us and we just like took over the class and we made up our own curriculum and we made it
ourselves. We did this whole like out of the box thing and it was funny because the next cohort over the
next year was like, ‘oh that Dr. C is kind of boring.’ But that’s a that’s the truth about teaching is that
there is a part of it that’s just chemical; you have to have like the right people together at the right time
with the right spark, you know? So that happened for me in grad school, which is great. I was lucky that I
student taught with an amazing teacher I think some people talk about student teaching as sort of like
being thrown in the deep end – not always a positive description of student teaching. But I taught with
John Zola, who was my master’s teacher, and he was just an amazing social studies teacher, like fantastic,
and also a great mentor, like he just took time and let me… He just really put effort into teaching me how
to be a teacher and I realized now, you know, I didn’t realize at the time but it’s like I still do stuff the
way that he taught me to do stuff, so it was all lucky it wasn’t like I went out and sought the perfect thing,
but I fell into a beautiful path and it was really great. Yeah, I would give him huge credit.”

MARA

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND: She got a Political Science degree with a minor in Women’s
Studies and French from Southern Oregon University in Ashland, Oregon.

HAS TAUGHT HIGH SCHOOL FOR: She has been teaching at the high school level for about 10
years.

SUBJECTS TAUGHT/TEACHING: She currently teaches social studies (two government classes), but
has taught psychology, Alaska history, and U.S. history.

BECAME TEACHER BECAUSE: “My background really is in grassroots organizing and politics,
engaging citizens, and being a part of our democracy. Um, with that background, like running for office,
and like being involved in the decision law-making process was like, you know, my goal since I was in
high school. I ran for assembly when I was 23, in 2005, and that was a slap in the face. You know, I was
told, we need more young people, we need more women, we need more minorities, we need all these
things, but not now … So, the day after that election, I registered as a non-partisan and kind of like, was
heartbroken about the party system. But anyway, um, I guess from there, like, I kind of had to make a
choice whether I was going to keep running or if there was a different passion that I had that I wanted to pursue … And so, I just kind of reflected on like, this is really kind of my most fulfilling moment, although actually I mean, so then I decided to go to law school. So, I moved to Washington. I was starting to get residency there, and then and then I had this moment of like, do I really want to be a lawyer? What do I want to do? So that’s when I decided that I wanted to become a teacher. And I had actually spent six months teaching in Korea kind of doing a heritage thing, but also like, trying out teaching. And so, then I came back to Juneau and did my master’s program. So that’s a one-year program. And that was in 2010, so seven years later, and it was kind of intended to be like a filler until I was ready to get back into politics. But the more I do it, the more I love it, and like this, you’re working for the school district has been horrible, and it has made me definitely reflect on whether I wanted to like do something different, and it just, I guess, confirmed even more that I really, really, really love teaching. I’m really passionate about teaching government. And you know, you can’t be a full-time government teacher, so that kind of put me grid locked me into social studies, which is an interesting thing, since I’m not one of those people who memorizes all these historical facts or anything like that. So, I do teach social studies, so I have typically I have two government classes. And then through time, like I taught psychology, I’ve taught Alaska history, I’ve taught U.S. history. And right now, I’m kind of happy with my current caseload where I teach Alaska history, which I think is very like… it’s kind of political to me, like, the fact that we have Alaska history to me, like I’ve seen it, I’ve observed and witnessed people teach it in different ways.”

CHARLENE

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND: She got her bachelor’s degree in history from UCLA. She doesn’t currently have a teaching credential but got her master’s is in sociology from San Diego State and is currently in a PhD program for education.

HAS TAUGHT HIGH SCHOOL FOR: She has been teaching at the high school level for a little over 1 year. But has also subbed for that school for about a year before that and was also a sociology instructor for 3.5 years before that as well.

SUBJECTS TAUGHT/TEACHING: She currently teaches humanities (English and History) and a class called Design.

BECAME TEACHER BECAUSE: “As an educational researcher, I felt very strongly that if I was going to be able to criticize K-12, which I did frequently, that I really needed to be also be in like in the throes of it because so frequently researchers like to crap all over teachers without knowing really what it means to be a teacher. And, you know, thinking that 1 to 3 years of classroom experience is enough to say, ‘oh yeah those teachers are terrible people.’ And while, yes, of course there are terrible teachers, there’s no I’m not even there’s no denying that, right, but I also think that there are so many variables that teachers have to combat that, um, that I just felt like it was necessary – also I really liked teaching. And when I was subbing, it was one of those things that just kind of confirmed that that was the route that I wanted to go so I liked teaching at the community college level, I liked teaching at the four-year university level, but there was something missing. So, when I was subbing, I always felt like that’s where I was
supposed to go, and I’ve actually always had wanted to be a high school teacher since I was in high school, and I just never did because I didn’t get the right guidance on how to get my credential, I didn’t get the right, you know, suggestions, there was a lot of things that kind of just prevented it and so when I had the opportunity, I took it and it just was kind of perfect timing. In terms of mentors, I’ve had quite a few. My middle school English teacher was a very big mentor for me. And then my high school band teacher was a great mentor for me and then to keep going in the direction of, you know my graduate level sociology instructor Dr. Choi, and just, you know, kind of just like different things along my journey too.”

MIA

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND: She graduated from Drake University with a major in secondary education, with endorsements in social studies and Spanish. She got her master’s in Data and Organizational Leadership.

HAS TAUGHT HIGH SCHOOL FOR: She has been teaching at the high school level for 10 years.

SUBJECTS TAUGHT/TEACHING: She has taught a variety of subjects but started off with high school Spanish. She also has taught ESL overseas, as well as in the U.S. She teaches Humanities (English and Ethnic Studies), Spanish, and a Heritage Spanish class.

BECAME TEACHER BECAUSE: “So, I know like a lot of folks have this calling, or they’ve always known that they wanted to be, that’s not me. I initially thought I wanted to go into international business because I’ve always loved traveling and just international world and cultures and whatnot. But then I changed my majors, several times, I didn’t really know what I wanted to do. And, based on some previous experiences working with young people, I really was like, I want to work with young people because, like empowerment and social change. And also, it’s more fun than an office. So, then I landed on education because I could still take the classes, but I wanted, like the social sciences and language, but also be working towards a career field that I would find meaningful. Yeah, and so then as I got into teaching that’s when I really started to understand more of like social systems and dynamics, and why empowerment and why education is so important and I quickly transformed my idea from just, you know, general empowerment and general education as good, to being like, no, this is like a really crucial tool for social change.”

Procedure

As previously stated, participants were obtained through convenience and snow-ball sampling. On January 28th, 2021, I posted on my Instagram story, “Did you have a high school teacher(s) that inspired you to think critically about the world/reality? If so, please slide up – I
would love to interview them for my thesis project!!” Although there was some overlap in terms of multiple people referring me to the same teachers, a little over 40 people responded to my question, which was extremely motivating and inspiring. I then picked teachers based on convenience. The references gave me the teachers’ emails and alluded to the likelihood of their participation, which informed my decision of who I would reach out to. I ended up sending emails to 16 high school teachers on February 24th (the day after the Pitzer IRB approved my project). Of the 16, 9 of them confirmed that they would like to participate, while two responded that they would not, and five did not respond at all. In response to their confirmation, I sent them a consent form and inquired about scheduling a time that worked for both of us. After conducting my 9th interview, that participant expressed that she had someone in mind that would probably love to be a part of this project. She gave me their email, I reached out to them, they confirmed their desire to participate, and we scheduled an interview time. All of the interviews conducted were virtual through either a phone call or Zoom, whichever the participant preferred. The first interview conducted took place on March 5th, 2021, while the last interview took place on March 27th, 2021. Interviews ranged between 22 minutes and 1 hour and 9 minutes, with the average interview lasting about 52 minutes. Before recording each interview, I asked for their consent to record, then after hearing them say it was okay, I asked again once I started recording. Participants had the right to stop the interview at any time.

Interview Protocol

Interviews conducted were semi-structured, meaning that the conversation was fluid and I allowed for participants to take it where they wanted to. That being said, there were instances where participants would be answering a question and it would, to some extent, address another one of my questions, which led me to prioritize other topics (being cognizant of time). Given the
subjectivity of their own experiences and stories, I also tended to ask follow-up questions that were specific to them that I would not ask another participant. However, as I continued interviewing, I did gain insight and ideas relative to creating an environment that fosters critical consciousness-raising in students, which I then asked the remaining participants but was unable to ask those I had already interviewed. Below I have included a copy of the exact interview question sheet that I used throughout the 10 interviews conducted:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

BEFORE BEGINNING

1. Do I have your consent to record this interview?
   a. *If “yes,” proceed…*

AFTER BEGINNING

1. Do I have your consent to record this interview?
   a. *If “yes,” proceed…*

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

1. If you’d like me to use a pseudonym to refer to you, what name would you like me to use?
2. If you are comfortable sharing, what is your gender identity and what pronouns do you use?
3. If you are comfortable sharing, how do you identify racially and/or ethnically?
4. If you are comfortable sharing, would you consider yourself a young adult, middle-aged adult, or a senior?

BACKGROUND TEACHING QUESTIONS

1. What is your educational background?
   a. Where did you get your bachelor’s degree? Where did you get your teaching credential?
2. Which subject do you teach in high school?
3. How long have you been teaching at the high school level?
   a. Did you teach other grades or subjects before now? If so, which grade(s) and subject(s)?
4. What inspired you to be a teacher?
   a. Did you have any mentors that heavily influenced your journey to education? If so, how?

**MAIN TEACHING QUESTIONS**

1. Main question: Do you try to inspire critical thinking and/or critical consciousness-raising within your students? How?
2. Would you say that you have a current teaching style or pedagogy? What is it?
   a. How has your teaching style or pedagogy changed since you first started teaching? Why? What have you learned?
3. If comfortable sharing, how do your own identities (gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, ability, etc.) influence your teaching in the classroom, if they do?
4. How much of ‘you’ do you display to your students? In other words, how much are you authentically yourself while teaching and interacting with students versus performing? How and why?
   a. How do you grapple with wearing your ‘teaching hat’ and your “name” (i.e.: Kiera) hat”? Where do you draw the line? Why?
5. What are the social norms within your classroom?
   a. How do you influence these norms? What tactics/strategies do you use to do this?
   b. Have you ever broken the social norms of the classroom? Have your students?
      How do you react or respond?
6. What role does discipline play in your teaching style / strategies?
   a. How do you engage with the power you hold as an authority figure within the classroom?
7. Do you connect lessons to the real world and student experiences? How?
8. Do you attempt to integrate creativity within your classroom? How so?
9. How do you define progress and how do you assess student progress?
10. How do you measure something that is immeasurable, such as your ability to influence your students?
    a. How do you measure your own success as a teacher?
11. What are the key differences for you between a ‘good’ day teaching and a ‘bad’ day teaching?
12. What are the most rewarding things about teaching?
13. What have been some of the most difficult experiences as a teacher? Why?
14. Have you ever experienced burnout?
    a. What are your strategies to mitigate burnout? What keeps you going?
15. I created this word, *Inspiragination*, to describe an experience I had with a professor of mine my first year in college. What does the word mean to you?
    a. My own definition is, “moments or experiences in which one is inspired to imagine.” With that in mind and reflecting on your own teaching experiences, do
you think you have encouraged any of your students’ *inspiragination* before? How did you do it?

16. Is there anything that you want to share that we didn’t get a chance to discuss yet?

17. What is your favorite ‘fun’ book? What is a book that heavily influenced you? (Could be the same one)

Thank interviewee for their time and remind them that:

1) *if there is anything that they would like me to omit from the interview that I can do so,*
2) *this interview will be transcribed, and the audio or audio/visual recording will be deleted immediately after the transcription is created,* and
3) *the research collected for this study will not be used for any purpose besides the senior thesis.*

Each interview was fully transcribed with Otter.ai, a transcription software. I’ve included all of the transcriptions at the end of this research paper (page 110).

**Positionality Statement**

It is important to highlight and reflect upon my own positionality as a researcher to understand how I collected, interpreted, and continue to understand my findings. This is significant to consider and acknowledge given that my intersecting identities provide me with privileges and disadvantages simultaneously depending on the social context of my own interactions and experiences. Although I possess other identities as well, I believe that my project has been most heavily informed by my intersecting identities of race, class, and gender. I am a white, middle-upper class, cis-gendered woman having attended a predominantly white high school and, more broadly, growing up in a predominantly white community.

Racially, my participant makeup was heavily influenced by this background, given that four of the ten participants were from my own high school, as well as because those who referred the other participants to me were either from my high school or from my university (which is also predominantly white). This is significant to point out, given that apart from two participants that identify as POC, my research lacks perspectives, experiences, and insights from teachers
who identify as racially different from White or Asian. This is a problem that I have grappled with throughout my research, and I want to acknowledge there are many voices to be heard and added to this research project. I also want to point to the insider positionality I possessed in sharing the same racial identity with 8 of the 10 participants. This may have influenced their comfortability as well as my own comfortability throughout the interviews (i.e., feeling comfortable talking about their race, how their race informs their teaching, etc., because I’m white).

In terms of my economic status (middle-upper class), I would not be who I am, nor interested in this topic, without having the opportunity and privilege to attend a post-secondary institution, which would not have been possible without the financial assistance from my family. Additionally, it is important to note that my own story and upbringing is significant with regard to informing this project, in that I come from what I would deem a white, wealthy, ‘bubble’ – Bainbridge Island. That being said, leaving for college and taking my first sociology course was instrumental in that that is where I feel as though I gained my own critical consciousness, and was inspired to recognize my own agency and power to create change in the world. I wholeheartedly believe that if students are not only not aware, but also not inspired to change reality, the chances of them doing it are virtually zero, and I don’t think I would have gained this desire to have teaching be that avenue to create change had I not had the opportunity to attend college.

Finally, I recognize and have reflected upon my identity as a cisgender woman informing my own comfortability with my participants. With the participants that identify as women, I have an insider positionality in that that shared identity influenced both my own comfortability as well as their comfortability throughout the interviews (i.e., they may have
shared more with me because they may have thought I would relate). I also think it’s possible
that the men may have shared more with me given the potential stereotypes that come with being
a woman (having the capacity, to empathize, care, listen, etc.).

I hope it is clear that systems of oppression and domination are not exempt from this
project, and although that is problematic, it is something to acknowledge and intentionally
navigate. As a reader, I hope that you utilize your own critical lens while reading and
understanding my findings.
CHAPTER FOUR: TEACHING STRATEGIES

After critically analyzing conversations I had with such inspiring and influential high school teachers, I present to you 10 contributing factors that affect the raising of one’s students’ critical consciousness. These include, but are most definitely not limited to, 1) teachers should cultivate content so that students find it relevant to their lives 2) there should be effort energy, and intention placed into building relationships with one’s students 3) the physical layout of the learning environment should be humanizing 4) life is contradictory and complex, teach it that way: unlearning, relearning, and gaining perspectives apart from one’s own 5) don’t be afraid to share your story, but also find that line in the sand that feels right for you 6) psychological and physical safety should be a top priority 7) approaches to discipline and utilizing your real and assumed power 8) teaching as a political act? 9) these things may burn you out: here’s what they are and some mitigation strategies (p.s. you will fail so many times & you will never be fully prepared) 10) inspiragination: a fluid concept. While reading, I want you to imagine an ice tray before you put it in the freezer, okay? Although there are individual molds for the water to fill, the water is still able to slush around from one mold to the next. I encourage you to think about these concepts as fluid in this same way: they are not disjointed or disconnected from one another, but rather inform and impact each other reciprocally and continuously. If you feel like the water is beginning to freeze, please kindly take it out of the freezer.
Finally, while this section is filled with length anecdotes and stories, there is also so much that I didn’t include here. With that being said, if interested, I urge you to take a peek at the transcripts where there is more to learn too. There is a lot to unpack here; lots of ideas, thoughts, suggestions. I hope that you realize that this is not a summation presented to you on a golden platter of everything you must do in order to raise your students’ critical consciousness, but rather an incomplete guide readily available to dissect and learn from.
I. TEACHERS SHOULD CULTIVATE CONTENT SO THAT STUDENTS FIND IT RELEVANT TO THEIR LIVES

**Students are less likely to be engaged if they don’t care**

I think most people assume that learning is gaining knowledge or gaining skills. So, they have you practice the skill a lot, or memorize a lot of the knowledge. I've discovered most 16-year-old kids are sound asleep after about 20 minutes of that. And there's a reason. And it's because even the skill, you know, if you learn how to do equations, in math, you still don’t know what the hell you're going to do with those equations in math. So, there's no connection to the kid’s future ... if I felt that the students were arguing things that they found important, then I knew that learning was happening (Layton)

Have you ever been listening to a teacher and they’re talking about something that you just could care less about? Or even worse, it appears that they could care less about it? I have, and chances are, you have too. That being said, a theme that was mentioned over and over and over again by my interviewees was ensuring that in some way or another, the students were given the opportunity and tools to understand why what was being taught mattered. Of course, not every student is going to relate to the same things, or even if they do, that relationship is not the same. But a lack of relation to course content is not the same as a lack of consideration as to why the content is significant to understand.

Although I believe it is possible to make content relevant in any class, it is important to mention that the extent to which the teacher can make connections from content to students depends on the class one is teaching. Cone admitted, “I don't want to lie and make you think like, every time it's easy, I find it particularly hard in the classes that are mandatory. So, like a world history class, and civics... I feel like I can do it, but it's like, sometimes it's a little awkward, like, ‘here's the transition’ … I find it a lot easier in my electives” (Cone). However, here are some ideas or suggestions that teachers can consider while being cognizant of its applicability.
One strategy involves giving students opportunities to engage with their broader community. Just as Styslinger et al. emphasized the importance of striving to make the world the students’ classroom, both Madden and Cone expressed that they bring in or go out to engage with guest speakers to help make the content more tangible. Madden stated that he sometimes has his students “go out and interview other people, or go visit historical sites, or bring people into the classroom” while Cone provided a more specific example of having the opportunity to meet and discuss with Sarah Collins, a survivor of the bombing at the 16th Street Baptist Church.

We looked at the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, which most kids know about, right, you know, the four little girls who were killed. But um, yeah, earlier this week, we talked - there were actually five girls in the bathroom, and four of them died and one lived, and the one who lived, Sarah Collins, is the sister of Addie Mae Collins, one of the girls who died. So, we talked to Sarah Collins, right, and that happened 58 years ago. And so, you know, when you're able to personalize it, when you're gonna say, like, let's talk to this person who lived in a city that was terrorized. I mean, that's pretty powerful (Cone).

Cone also discussed how he is fortunate to have the opportunities to take his students out on field trips to engage with the broader community,

…sometimes we go on field trips, and the kids are like, you know, pretty nervous, right? But I have to tell you, that's something pretty empowering. Like, if you were to go to the World Bank, we used to go to the World Bank, and we meet with a guy who's the president, in this, like, 13th floor office, like, I always make sure every kid could ask a question. So, it could be a kid who's like getting Cs in every class is there only honors class… that kid was ready to ask a question. And to me, that's so important, because that gets to, how do you think about yourself? Right? Do you think that you're the sort of person who like…you're capable of thinking an interesting thought, you're capable of asking shit to the President of the World Bank? And I would like track it, when you're on the field trip, every kid has to ask at least one question every day. We can't have Johnny over there not asking a question, because he slowly starts to feel like a piece of shit. Like, ‘I'm just hanging out, and I'm not really a part of this.’ So, if you were with us, and weren't going to these meetings, walking down the street, we look maniacal. Like, we have kids in pairs and they're practicing their questions, and they're giving feedback. And a lot of times I'm purposeful, I get a really like cool senior to like, mentor somebody. But then I'll be like, ‘Okay, everybody, change! Go fist to fist!’ And then you know, they go fist a fist and go, ‘I don't like these groups go fist to fist!’ And we're trying to build camaraderie. And we're trying to build a sense, like, we all succeed when any of us succeeds (Cone).
Within this theme of engaging with community, Cone also presents the importance of making sure that every student feels valuable, both by ensuring that every student has something to ask and contribute, as well as by implementing techniques to build community within their own class (fist to fist partner-pairing). Jean-Paul also touched on the importance of engaging with community, sharing how he would frame projects that would be based within the students’ own communities,

And part of the projects that we would put them on would be about reimagining their own community. About, you know, the difference that painting a house makes, you know, we had the whole school repainted all of the exterior elements redone, and then the students would go block by block, door by door, to offer to help families to get things cleaned up and get things back to a place that might make them feel safer as they walk to school. Because we would do community visits, we walked down a block and one house was absolutely immaculate and the next house had, you know, broken whiskey bottles out front and beer bottles and crack pipes sitting out front, and we would talk about all those things and work on them together (Jean-Paul).

This anecdote parallels Sosa-Provencio’s (2020) assertion, namely that educators should focus on constructing student experiences in ways that build community knowledge and encourage community-connected youth. Not only this, but Jean-Paul also gave an example of the class spearheading a project surrounding operas,

I'll give you an example of a real-world project they did that just floored me. We talked about how students in different parts of San Diego didn't have access to all of the cultural elements that other students did. So, we specifically took a look of all things at, why there was a deep misunderstanding about operas, and you know, who gets to go see them because they're usually phenomenally expensive and hard to access. And students would say, ‘Well, I don't like opera.’ And the question was, ‘do you not like opera because you don't know opera, or do you not like opera because you've been to a bunch of operas, and you decided you didn't want to go to one?’ … What these students did is they approached the San Diego opera to have an opera written for a seventh-grade level class, and they organized all of the resources to have every seventh grader to go and see the opera. To just see and experience a theatrical act in different ways, and part of that was discussing their own projected feelings of how they thought different students would react and where that came from in society, and what made them think that… what made them think that a Hispanic, Latina or Latino student would not necessarily react to the opera. What made them think that perhaps African American or Black student wouldn't… and they'd
have to really explore their own deep-seated misunderstandings of society as a whole. And you know, explore why they thought an affluent, white student would be into gangster rap, but somebody that had grown up in a neighborhood that might be known for that would not enjoy something that an affluent, white student would have access to... and get into the social issues, and that's where the harder conversations happen, because they started to become more aware of how ingrained racial and social issues are, into what you're watching on TV, what you're hearing in the radio, what you see, depicted, that's there, you know (Jean-Paul).

Again, this is nuanced and it’s easier to make these connections in some classes rather than others, but it’s entirely possible regardless of the class, it just requires the teacher to be creative. Like, let’s say you’ve got a geometry class, you could talk about the lengths and widths and surface areas of the buildings you see within the community while also igniting conversations that Jean-Paul mentioned about why half the block looks like X and half the block looks like Z. Although it’s a math course, it would encourage the students to utilize their critical consciousness, and maybe even influence that thinking to be used in their other courses.

Although this doesn’t involve going outside the classroom walls, Lewis, a current statistics teacher, touches on how he is able to connect his math content to students’ lives,

I find myself constantly trying to create assessments and like, data sets, to get them to think critically upon not only what they're doing, like the whole mathematic algorithms behind what they're doing, manipulating variables or using normal CDF like trying to find area in a curve, but what the hell that means like, what is this implication of what you're trying to discover. So, you try to do it with real life data sets where, where they care about outcomes, and the topics, whether it's, you know, social justice or climate change or animal densities or whatever... and that gets that critical thinking piece in there (Lewis).

Thus, it’s not impossible, it just requires a bit more thoughtful effort. Mara, having a governmental background, also brought up the point that by having students engage with their communities with you, they are more likely to engage with their communities in the future on their own,

...my teaching strategy has always been hands on life experience, like we learn from doing, and I'm a very kinesthetic learner, so I have to physically, like do things in order to
learn them … I think, again, being a kinesthetic learner, that if they've done it once before, then they'll do it again, it's like voting, right? If you vote when you're 18, you're going to vote every year, every year, every year. And so, if they are 17 or 18, and they've sat in a testimony room, and they've read the testimony and done it, then the likelihood that they'll do it is going to be greater, you know. So really giving them the tools and empowering them with the ability to participate as much as they possibly can, in this limited amount of time that I have them is really important. And that's all real life, real life learning (Mara).

If teachers cultivate environments in which students are prompted to understand their relation to the content, the content’s relation to the world, and how they can continue to exercise that relation after leaving one’s class, now that is pretty magical.

Another aspect of making the content relevant the students’ lives is having intentionality while posing questions to the students. Layton emphasized that “the most important thing is to when you look at the literature, is there something in there that still related to today … you have to be able to stop the book and take on these tangential things that connect to the kids” (Layton). In Layton’s case, as a literature teacher, he shared his strategy of always having five questions that can’t be answered in the book or reading. Here he is describing an example when reading *The Great Gatsby*,

So, we will have read Great Gatsby. And one of the questions I would ask is, “do we have any responsibility to take care of the poor?” And everybody would go, “wait, what, what?” And I’d say, “well, what I saw the book kind of dances around the fact that Gatsby's wealthy, but it's based in a time period when there's great poverty, Fitzgerald ignores it. Is that okay? That we ignore poor people? How many of you walk by the guys, you know, with little sign out? Can you spare a dime when we get off the ferry boat?” So, you come in with those five questions. There are sometimes called essential questions, but the answer is not in the book. But as the conversation grows, to what they've experienced to what they see going on in the news, I bring it back to the book. I said that Gatsby was incredibly poor, and he became self-made, but he did it through crime. Does that change your answer? So again, five questions. I control those, I control where the conversation is going to end. That's my ultimate authority. How they answer, it's totally theirs (Layton).

As a humanities teacher, Katie mirrored Layton’s emphasis on question-asking, and provided a series of ‘layered questions’ that she often exercises with her students,
I think over the years I find sort of the right questions about how they connect it to their life. And so, in a discussion, we start, I can sort of see that we start with this layer of like just clarification. So, the first questions are like, ‘what are the authors saying? What do these terms mean? Do we understand that thesis?’ So, we do that. And then we might get to like, ‘Why did they say that? How did this make sense in the context that they were in?’ And then we get to like, ‘Is this true now? Is this true for me? Is this true in my life? Could this be useful for me in my life?’ I think that's like a pattern that we do over and over (Katie).

With regards to questions, Katie also shared that in order to encourage students to use their critical consciousness, it’s important to ask questions that don’t necessarily have a right answer and to be transparent about the fact that you aren’t the holder of the right answer either. Not only does this give students the freedom to think about their position or opinion, decentering the teacher as the possessor of ‘things to know’ and dismantles the Banking Method of Education that Freire warns against.

Another popular aspect includes being thoughtful when choosing course content and types of assessments. Cone expressed his belief that students are going to forget “80 to 90 percent of what they learned in your class within a short period of time,” giving more reason to try to pick issues or frame topics in ways that will be interesting to the students, “I have faith, that, like, if we're doing interesting work in class, I can take just about any kid, like, just about any kid could come and take this class and be successful” (Cone). That being said, he shared with me that he would give students opportunities to choose topics for themselves, as well as double check to make sure that they were being considerate in picking something that genuinely sparked their curiosity,

I say, ‘Okay, what do you want to know?’ Usually, people are in groups, and we have a class of 30. Maybe there's like 10-12 groups, and you'll say, I want to know, blah, blah, blah. And I'll say, like, “Ehh, it doesn't sound so interesting. But tell me.” And then you'll tell me, and then I'll be like, “Okay, I get it, I get why you care about that.” Or you'll say, like, “I was just giving you a topic, because I knew I had to have a topic.” And I was like, ‘Well, what do you really care about?’ (Cone)
This check-in is worth the effort, as it makes sure that students are partaking in topics that they are actually curious about, as well as covertly teaches them that this is what learning is supposed to feel like (sort of like the pleasure in learning notion that hooks discusses). Making sure that students genuinely care decreases the likelihood that they will perceive their education like a paper cup, as Lipman discussed previously. In response to me asking what some examples of class work he had his students do, Jean-Paul replied, “it would depend upon what the students’ interests were, because I wasn't going to let my interest be the dominant interest” (Jean-Paul). While it is important to give students this academic freedom and to decenter yourself as their teacher, Charlene also touches on the significance of utilizing your position to intentionally choose books/readings/articles/etc. that the students can relate to outside of class. Here is an anecdote from Charlene discussing her decision to read, *The Hate You Give,*

...in *The Hate You Give*, the main character, Starr, if you're not familiar with it, she is a young, Black, woman who is going to a predominantly white school because it's in a predominantly white neighborhood. And one of the things that I immediately started talking about, I asked them like, ‘why, like, why is this happening?’ And they didn't quite piece it together or anything but then what I started doing was I connected the experiences that Starr was going through and why her neighborhood was what it was to the issues of redlining, for instance, and how redlining absolutely plays a role. So, we started talking about that in connection to San Diego neighborhoods, and where some of the wealthiest neighborhoods are and where some of the poorest neighborhoods are and why. It's not because those neighborhoods, and those folks in there didn't work hard enough, it's because it was intentionally designed that way, right? (Charlene).

Building off of Charlene’s point, Katie and Mara also indicate the intention puts towards creating opportunities for their students to feel a sort of responsibility after engaging with class content. Katie and Mara voiced that their curricula often include some sort of reflection piece, in which students have the opportunity to think about how they are personally related to the content. Katie posed, “there's no point if they don't have some reflection piece … I want them to feel connected to the content, and to feel connected, they have to maybe make choices and decisions about it,
and to feel responsible about it in a way, like to think, ‘now I have this information, what am I
going to do?’” (Katie). Similarly, Mara shared how she also has her students reflect on the course content, utilizing a current event journal throughout the semester/year. She also shared her hope that her students will create habits, such as looking at the news daily, in order to be inspired to learn from resources apart from solely the textbook (Mara).

Madden also expressed that all students learn differently, so it is important to recognize this and provide a variety of types of sources and content that relate to today, in order to engage as many students as possible,

I can basically use a huge array of materials and sources to kind of stimulate the kids. So, for instance, we might look at a variety of historical documents from in the past but also using, you know, recent materials so that the kids feel like they're staying current with what’s going on today and we don't have to just use textbooks. I mean, we just use a ton of different materials, whether it can be anything from a graphic novel, or a biography, or a variety of other texts and primary source documents … for instance we might look at, you know, The Los Angeles Times, or, you know, the Chicago Tribune or something, or Washington Post and take a look about what's happening in real time. Or we might watch some sort of documentary or video and stuff like that to give them a much stronger sense of what's happening right now (Madden).

Jean-Paul indicated that one of the most impactful ways to get students to understand the material as relevant and important is to frame content and project as actual contributions to the world around them. He expressed that they would examine how to develop how to frame problems and how to reframe problems so that students could come up with potentially tangible solutions. For instance, he shared that he made sure that students’ final projects were, “based in the concept of realia, making sure that students would have something that was real and fixed that they could be working on. So, it wouldn't necessarily matter what the project was, it had to be based in progressing a concept from the world and your understanding and your contribution towards it. Whatever it is you developed at the end, had to be functional and usable. You couldn't just throw it away” (Jean-Paul). Engaging with content in which one understands that it is a
problem, how they are positioned toward the problem, and with that information how they might address that problem, directly parallels the critical (pun-intended) role that critical consciousness can play in encouraging students to engage with the world around them.

Finally, Mara brought up how as teachers can make the mistake of assuming that they know what their students would be curious about. Thus, she expressed how she starts the beginning of every year allocating time to genuinely get to know her students in order to increase the chances that they will have the opportunities to work on assignments and projects that intrigue them, “it's super important to understand who my students are, and their identity that they bring is, that’s the most like, powerful thing that I have as a teacher. And so like, we do a PowerPoint about who they are, and what their passions are, and what their post high school plans are, what their hobbies are, you know, that's really like me understanding like, how can I connect their service learning projects so that it's going to be meaningful for them? And that they're going to get the most out of it? How can I get them to write a letter to the editor about something that they're really passionate about?” (Mara). Fortunately, building relationships with students has more benefits on top of helping to make the content relevant to students.
II. THERE SHOULD BE EFFORT, ENERGY, & INTENTION PLACED INTO BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE’S STUDENTS

YOU ARE A LEADER AND MENTOR: TAP INTO IT.

...that was at the core of everything I did, was making sure there was a really strong relationship, and that my students knew that, even when we had a conflict, that I cared for them, and I loved them, and that I saw in them a potential that they didn't see necessarily because they didn't have the perspective that I had yet, but I was going to get them that perspective. (Jean-Paul)

Although there are boundaries that teachers need to draw when it comes to building relationships with their students, overall, there was unanimous agreement that putting effort, energy and intention towards building relationships with one’s students was beneficial to raising their critical consciousness. This section combines some reasons as to why that is as well as some tips and tricks regarding how one might work towards doing this.

Katie expressed that it’s important to prioritize building relationships with your students from the get-go, going on to say that students need to feel seen and competent before diving into the material, “You have to make them feel like they have whatever skills they need to engage in the work that you're doing” (Katie). Lewis also mentioned this, stating, “Now don't get me wrong, you know 90% of what happens in my classroom is focused on the content, but if that's all I did, you know I would be bored and, you know, and they would be bored, and I would just be like everybody else. You know, so I think it's that other thing, which I don't have a word for, but it is fun. It is fun where you develop a little environment, a little family in that classroom” (Lewis). Students are humans too, not little machines there to solely take in and digest the content you present to them. Both Lewis and Uitvlugt shared with me that there is this intangibility of it all, of the space when relationships with the students are healthy and encouraging their growth. Uitvlugt shared that he tries to incorporate how to “be a good person,
and all these other kind of… intangible, not in the curriculum, sort of things that I think teaching can be” (Uitvlugt). Although there exists this beautiful ambiguity within teaching, Jean-Paul discussed that before anything else, you must engage in a critical pedagogy of your own, understanding that before anything else students must have their basic needs met in order to learn at their best potential, and as the teacher you have the power to choose to prioritize them in that manner, “I had a platform where I could see all of the greatness within them, even when they were going through a period of their life where… a period where you probably need that the most, but you have at the least” (Jean-Paul). Of course, a student’s ‘basic needs’ differ depending on the student, but that is why it is integral for teachers to understand their students beyond them being just students. He went on to say that he utilized a method called *Socratic Hope*, which he explained is,

…where you join students where they are at their own level, and then you move with them through that, but they have to lead the learning. The goal is that they lead the learning and that you're there to support that learning in several ways, you're there as a life coach, you're there as a subject matter expert. But first and more important than anything else, is you're there as an expert of adolescent development, and community resources, so that way you can help them get through it, because if they're not getting their baseline needs met, learning is you know, something else, and you know, we had students that worked jobs to make sure that their families weren't being evicted, I had students that were homeless, and it was a day to day basis trying to figure out where they were going to live. We had students that that were all over the spectrum that were there. So that was the first thing was to engage in critical pedagogy at all times (Jean-Paul).

Prioritizing that is one thing, but it is another thing for the teacher to be able to even recognize that students are needing those needs met first. Although it is up for debate whether this relies on the individual’s personality and ability, Charlene told me about what she calls her ‘magic trick,’ which essentially involves her being extremely observant and empathetic of and towards her students, “So I have this little, I call it my magic trick, that I can basically figure out students within a couple of days … I call it my magic trick but it's because I'm able to observe students”
(Charlene). Again, while the ability to be observant is somewhat dependent on individuality, I simultaneously believe putting a conscious effort towards something is still worth trying and implementing, who knows how it could improve one’s practice. This skill is encouraged by Jaime-Diaz (2020) as well, who expressed how engaging with critical compassion centers the teacher’s ability to rely on their emotions to connect with and understand their students. Charlene also shared that having the ability to see the student as both an individual as well as a part of a collective (sort of like the sociological imagination),

…being able to see our individual experiences as a part of a larger collective is really, really valuable. And I think if you have any type of philosophy that focuses on individualism or individualistic ideals that that's not going to make you connect with your students, right? I think if we really forget the collective and the patterns like, these things are not new right our students experiencing trauma is not new. So, for me, I was able to connect with some of my teachers… the ones that I connected with the most though, were the ones who were able to understand both the individual experience as well as larger social issues … So, I think that the personality might play a role in it, but I think really the bigger thing is being able to recognize things are beyond just yourself and like the power of connection and the collective. I think really having some sort of creative imagination is really key to understanding and being able to kind of work through this (Charlene).

Taking the individual student as well as their relation to society into consideration while interacting and to know them is integral to forming a foundational relationship with them. That being said, what about the students that, as much as no teacher wants to admit, just does not like? What if you don’t want to put that effort and energy into someone that isn’t willing to reciprocate that same effort and energy? Although not every teacher needs to be like Katie, she argues that she consistently brings optimism and persistence toward conversations with all students,

I think if you know someone, you usually like them. In my workshop, yes, I meet them and it's really hard because sometimes they just get assigned to me and they're these difficult kids and they don't necessarily want to meet me and often when I first meet them, I'm like, ‘this is such an unlikable kid.’ But I know within a year, I'm just gonna love them - they're gonna be like my favorite person so I just have to say, ‘Wow, you're really hard to get to know but I know that I'm in love you at some point.’ If you if you approach them that way. I think that's helpful. Yeah, and even in class if you think, “I'm
probably misunderstanding why you're acting the way you're acting” and not take it personally - never take it personally - you're just the authority figure, and they don't know who you are so you can't get into a personal thing. Which isn't to say that I've never gotten pissed at kids or that I never, you know, come home, like you can't believe what's happened. I mean I do that, but I know that they are a beautiful human and that I'm going to love them someday, but you know, it's hard. So, I would say that the relationship is key (Katie).

Again, Katie assured me that she wouldn’t expect all teachers to utilize this approach but reiterated that it has been helpful and most definitely worth it in her experience. Additionally, it’s good to be aware of one’s own emotional capacity to put in that type of energy and labor. Going off of that, Mia underlines how building relationships with students is foundational because having that element of trust is helpful, if not, necessary, in order to get students to enter zones of growth with you and their peers. Mia states that “there also needs to be an element of mutual trust and vulnerability, especially when you're getting into this critical consciousness and talking about social systems and personal experiences and how these things go together” (Mia). She explained that this is an ongoing process, and that you should expect to make mistakes while working to build an environment of trust and community. However, like most relationships, others are likely to be more vulnerable if you are. The question is, where should and do teachers draw that line in the sand with respect to being their most genuine and authentic selves?
III. DON’T BE AFRAID TO SHARE YOUR STORY

Find that line in the sand that feels right for you.

Early in my career, I think I wanted to be liked. So, it's a little bit harder when you're closer to their age of, like, you know, it feels good to be the popular teacher, you know, but I do think you sacrifice some power when you do that, when I say power, power to influence. Because to influence you got to be able to influence when people don't want to be influenced (Lewis).

Another theme that arose was the extent in which teachers felt as though they were being authentic with their students to encourage the raising of their critical consciousness. In the previous section it became evident that building relationships with one’s students is integral to their own growth. However, relationship-building, regardless of the positionalities of those involved, often requires vulnerability and willingness to share personal characteristics, attributes, stories, etc. That being said, as Layton put it, “every teacher has to figure out where the line in the sand is … and I think most teachers can very quickly draw that line. What they cannot do is be afraid to tell some of their story” (Layton).

First and foremost, it became clear that there is no right way to draw that line: each teacher is on their own journey, has their own histories, their own experiences, their own values, which all influence and inform their decisions regarding when and what to share with their students. Lewis echoed this point, sharing that “you have to develop your own thing, there was another math teacher, he was so different than me, but he was authentic, and kids loved him, so there is not one way to do it. You just have to be you … it's your inner song, it comes out, and can students see it” (Lewis). Uitvlugt also touched on this point, stating that “We’re different people, you know, and some teachers - maybe they don't have different hats. You know, they're, they don't, they don't take that hat on or off. And it's just like, they're just themselves, and that's just who they are, and that's just how it comes out teaching” (Uitvlugt). The point is, finding that
line in the sand is up to you, and regardless of where that line is you can find opportunities to connect with your students.

Katie, Charlene, and Layton also told me that, essentially, students are smarter than they’re often given credit for, and that they can easily tell when you’re being ingenuine, which has the potential to sacrifice trust with them (if you aren’t being honest with yourself, you can’t expect them to be honest with you). Katie told me that students are like puppies, “They read you so well, you know, if you lack confidence, they can tell” (Katie), while Charlene shared how high school students “know when you're being authentic or not … they can sense it. They know when you're being true, you know, and, unlike other folks, from experience, they will have no problem calling you out on it or resisting in some way, right? They'll push back and push back and push back as much as possible, and push you to your breaking point because that's what kids do, like they're trying to test their boundaries, right?” (Charlene). Given that, developmentally, high school students are still testing their boundaries and seeing what is okay and what is not okay, that leaves teachers in a position to reflect on what those boundaries are going to be. However, it is arguable that critical consciousness-raising should involve teachers encouraging students to utilize their agency and test their boundaries in resisting authority, which brings us back to the point that it’s up to the individual to decide where that boundary is going to be, and ultimately if that line is going to benefit the students. Along those lines, Layton expressed similar points about students knowing when you’re being fake, but also shared his relation of authenticity with course content,

I think that students could smell a phony in under three minutes. And the classic way to be a phony is to teach the same thing year after year after year, because it's stale. I teach the same book, but I'm not going to teach it the same way. So ultimately, I teach by telling stories. I would talk about my own growing up … I believe it's important to honestly tell the stories. That doesn't mean I don't embellish the stories. I teach fiction. Of course, I'm going to add things. Of course, I'll leave things out. And I tell everybody that
I do that, and my teaching partner crack cups, and goes, ‘that story was much better this year.’ So that's okay. Because it's the impact of the story (Layton).

Apart from course content, however, Layton expressed his line in the sand “was always about my personal family … unless they were fun things like I would tell stories about my daughter's making sure they were ones that were okay to tell” (Layton). Madden told me that he feels like he is “95 percent” himself, and when asked what that 5 percent would entail, he responded, “Oh, I would just say in terms of, if there's anything that related to say, alcohol, drugs, things like that… something that you probably should not bring up. Or certain personal things with, whether it's related to, you know, your own children or your own family and things like that, that there are certain things, you know, that probably just should not be addressed” (Madden).

Uitvlugt and Mia both shared that the prioritize recognizing both themselves and their students as full, complex, human beings, Uitvlugt sharing, “I think the tricky part in the balance really is, you know, I'm not like, like buddies, you know, with my students, it's not like we’re friends. And I think student relationships are important, but it’s still a teacher student relationship, I'm not trying to be friends with students, but I can be human with students” (Uitvlugt). Mia echoed this, “it's really important that they see me as like a full human being in the same way that I'm striving to recognize their full human-ness, especially with the commitment to build that community piece” (Mia). Mia also told me how she is fully transparent about her line in the sand, “if there's a topic that I'm feeling particularly vulnerable about that we're talking about, you know I'm gonna name that so that they can start to build their own boundaries in respectful ways. And like that respect for privacy as well” (Mia). In this way, the students are also learning that both within and outside of class they have the agency and power to set boundaries for themselves. Mara also touched on the importance of boundaries, explaining
that as their teacher it’s okay to have your own privacy. Mara shared an anecdote with me regarding her identity as an Asian woman,

…especially as being a minority, it's a balance, a really important balance, and I think, but I also recognize that like, when I was student teaching, an Asian student looked at me and said, ‘Are you my teacher?’ and it was like, the first day that I was subbing, and I said, ‘Yeah,’ and he said, ‘Wow, you're the first Asian teacher that I've ever had.’ And like, 1% of teachers in Alaska are Asian. And so like, I always kind of remember that … I also honor, like, if I know that the most important tool I have to teach my students is to understand who they are, and what they're bringing to the table than they equally know that who I am, and what I bring to the table is also an important part (Mara).

Mara’s anecdote mirrors Chubbuck, who expressed that they were transparent about their own identities. Charlene also expressed that early on in her career she consciously made the decision to have all of her different ‘hats’ be as similar as possible. She told me that her ‘line drawing’ came down to a matter of language. She told me that compared to her college students, she finds herself ‘toning down’ her language with her high school students. When asked what exactly she was toning down, she told me, “My language and how critical I am with criticizing certain things. I am a big believer that, you know, education cannot be neutral because you either are one side or the other, and if you aren't calling out white supremacy, then you're allowing it… you're allowing it to happen and you're condoning it. But at the same time, I also want my students to arrive to the conclusions on their own with guidance” (Charlene). Like Mara, Charlene also touched on bringing her identities to the table, sharing “My identity is a part of the experience that they're going to have in my classroom so I can't pretend that those don't exist … I don't like to have my like attention on me, that's one of those things about me, but I also feel like it's important to share those things with students because there's nothing wrong with our identities” (Charlene).

It was also brought to my attention that in order to be authentic with one’s students, it requires you to first be authentic with yourself, which requires reflection. Mia shared an anecdote
with me regarding her own experiences of K-12 education, and how that impacted her journey to education,

So, my students and I were just talking about this the other day, like, what diversity looks like among teachers, and like, I, you know, I didn't have a teacher, an educator who was Black, Indigenous or POC until I was in college. And it was, it was something that I didn't realize that I was missing until I had it. Just because growing up and immersed in whiteness like I didn't think about it. And so that like unknowing really just made that light bulb go off in my head, like this is new! And why like I, you know all the things - you feel seen, you feel a little bit more connected. And so, that experience is something that has stayed with me. And also, like reflecting on, you know identity and personal experiences, and a lot of the unpacking that I've had to do just being raised, totally immersed in white culture, is I'm trying to show up as a teacher that I needed when I was in high school … I mean, I think that's, that's a huge part right, and that's part of white supremacy cultures, the people in power not examining their own selves (Mia).

Finally, it was apparent that while being cognizant of what to share, for some teacher it ultimately came down to whether or not they thought that sharing that information would be beneficial to the students. Lewis told me that he doesn’t feel like there’s a big difference between “Mr. Lewis” and “Brad,” other than that if he’s “100% Brad” he can say whatever he wants to say. He told me that he filters himself because “not everyone is where you're at when it comes to thinking about certain topics … so you got to kind of be careful, because you want to teach all the students, so you got to kind of mold yourself more into this universal Mr. Lewis, that even suppresses some of your own thoughts and ideas and opinions, because it's what's best for kids” (Lewis). The intention of this malleability is so that he is more likely to reach every student, “even the ones that are hard-headed, and you don't like, and they're not putting the work in, you still gotta try to reach them so, the only way to do that is really kind of, you know, it ain't about you, sort of, so to speak, you know?” (Lewis). Katie also discussed her understanding of her own authenticity in a way that centered putting her students first. For instance, she exemplified that she was genuine and honest with her students if she didn’t understand something,
I also think I used to feel like when sometimes a student would talk, if I didn't understand them that I had to think I had to be like, ‘That’s a really good answer’ and now I've learned to say, ‘I don't understand anything you just said tell me more, explain that more, what are you thinking?’ Knowing that sometimes it's actually because they understand that better than me and then sometimes it's because they don't really get it, but I think that's been important too - confidence to be really authentic and then that lets them be more authentic because they hear me say, ‘I don't get it,’ or, ‘what are you thinking?’ right?” (Katie).

While Jean-Paul told me that he feels like he doesn't change at all, “I share with the students is I don't I don't leave who I am at home, and then come and be somebody else, for their sake in the classroom. Who I am, is who I am,” he also explained that, like Katie, the line in the sand decision came from a place of prioritizing what would be best for his students,

When I looked at my student group, and I tried to look at each of them as individuals that were within a social system that wasn't designed for individuality. And I would reveal any number of things to my students, so long as it was relevant to their learning. Because it's not about me, right? So, an example is many of my students know about my own learning disabilities … I would share with them the truth, which is we don't all learn at the same pace and rate (Jean-Paul).

All in all, one can reflect and contemplate on where they think the line in the sand will be, but it’s also important to recognize that not only is this line subjective to each individual teacher, but it is also likely to change over time, as well as across circumstances. There are so many things that teachers cannot prepare for and knowing when to share personal sides of you is one of them. However, there are some aspects of teaching to raise critical consciousness that are very much in your control, such as the way in which you situate your classroom or learning environment.
IV. THE PHYSICAL LAYOUT OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT SHOULD BE HUMANIZING

IF YOU CARE WHERE YOUR BED IS IN YOUR ROOM, YOU SHOULD CARE WHERE THEIR DESKS ARE IN CLASS

I also am very explicit with why I do things, so instead of just redesigning the class, even though they complained about it I also told them why and I told him this because you have to look at each other now. Like you have to look at each other, and you have to humanize each other. (Charlene)

This section is short and sweet, primarily because I realized that the physical layout of the classroom was significant only after one of my interviewees (toward the end of the interview timeline) brought it up. Nonetheless, here are some of their thoughts and opinions regarding classroom layout.

Although the dynamics of classes differ depending on the subject or class, within Katie, Charlene, and Mia’s respective classes they all presented me with similar ideas. They all also paralleled Waller et. al. (2017), who indicated that arranging the desks in either a ‘U’ shape or circle is optimal so that students can face one another. Likewise, Katie told me, “it would be a big circle, and then I usually have them go to small groups for the first part and then we come into the big circle … it's usually a circle and then it's little circles in this big circle” (Katie). Charlene shared similar thoughts, alluding to the fact that she became their teacher midway through the year, and decided that changing the norm of the layout of the classroom was one of the first things she decided to do, “I turned it into a giant square, so that way it was more of like a circle setting than these fragmented and segmented desks. I also moved the table to the side of the room so it was more of a conference table, and I didn't have a desk, what I did was I sat either at the table with them, or I would walk around to help guide them and stuff” (Charlene).

Charlene expressed that this was extremely intentional because she wanted to establish a non-
hierarchical approach in order to decenter herself as the center of the focus. Charlene also told me that she was transparent with her students, sharing with them that her main reason for the setup was so that they had to look at one another, and thus, humanize each other. She also told me that she put all class resources in the center of the room, “I had offset the tables so you could walk into the middle, which is where like supplies and goods and stuff were, like, they could go stapling or like even just like fun paper like to draw on and stuff like that, so anybody could walk into the middle, but we were basically in like an offset square so that we, it was still, we would have we had to face each other” (Charlene).

Finally, Mia expressed to me that although she has never been able to accomplish this ideal layout, if she could, she would also choose to arrange the students into a large circle (particularly in her social studies class). Mia also introduced some nuance to the situation, that is, that it also depends on how many students are in the class and how big the classroom is. Another layout she expressed liking towards is having the students work in pods,

I guess in pods, three to four students … So, if I can arrange them so that there are groups of three, that's my favorite grouping to work with, I think that really fosters a lot of teamwork, naturally. Also, for me it's important that the students are able to discuss really easily, without having to move about the room. And also, it's more just part of our human nature to be sitting somewhat next to each other when we're in this shared space right? To sit in rows, to me, it feels really sterile. Yeah, that really takes away the opportunities for us to interact, like, just naturally and help each other with different things and talk about what's going on in our lives, just like a normal conversation, but also being in a group sets up for really intentional lesson planning (Mia).

Ultimately, I think that experimenting with different layouts is important to try, and see what feels best for you, and more importantly, the students. However, these three teachers all shared that creating a space, regardless of how one does that, that encourages the students to humanize one another increases the likelihood for authentic, genuine, and vulnerable conversations to take place, challenging students to grow and raise their critical consciousness.
V. **LIFE IS A CONTRADICTORY AND COMPLEX: TEACH IT THAT WAY**

**UNLEARNING, RELEARNING, AND GAINING PERSPECTIVES APART FROM ONE’S OWN**

*I went with what I believe to be a simple truth of living in the world today, and that is, you have to grow comfortable with and even excited by contradictions* (Layton).

It’s important to recognize that sometimes there just isn’t a right answer or way to do things, and teaching that to one’s students has the potential to encourage them to destabilize not only the content you are referring to in class but deconstruct other aspects of life that have been falsely categorized into a binary, black-and-white situation.

Layton went into the idea that people don’t like to admit that they have or live with contradictions, which stifles and hinders growth because this non-admittance often leads to non-thinking about them. Thus, Layton told me that he directly addresses his students and the contradictions that they live with in his classroom,

I can remember asking, you know, ‘how many of you would like to go to a good college?’ and most hands went up, ‘and how many of you are just exhausted and so irritated by the nonstop homework?’ And all the hands went up. I said, ‘Wait a minute. You don't get one without the other. How do you possibly live with that contradiction?’ And they smile, and say, ‘well that’s true.’ And I said, ‘No, you're not answering the question. How do you live with the contradiction?’ And it took them a while before they realized that's what they were doing. And some students began saying, ‘I get really stressed is what I do. I'm afraid of the future, I won't get into the school, and so I don't sleep well.’ And then another student said, ‘well, the bulk of us, we cheat. We copy each other's homework. You know, I didn't have time last night to get the stupid Spanish stuff done.’ So, we began looking at how we live with contradictions. And I said, the problem, of course, is nobody wants to admit they have contradictions … but if we learn to live with those contradictions, contradictions or conflicts, we can get excited about the solution (Layton).

Layton went on to say that he also would attempt to teach his students that just because there is conflict doesn’t mean there is no solution. He proceeded to lift up to fists in our interview and say, “Why do you have two hands? Because this hand wants to do this, this hand wants to do something different” (Layton). Critical consciousness involves recognizing that it’s okay to live
with contradictions (because, in Layton’s opinion, you have to), as well as that oftentimes we are taught that it’s either *this* or *that*, when really you, the student, has power to create solutions that haven’t been thought of before. Jean-Paul also addressed this, expressing how he attempts to teach his students that there is a lot more complexity in the world than we often understand at first, “What I attempted to do with the student groups that I worked with, was, first of all recognize that they needed to become aware of complexity in the world, and social complexity, and needed to start to connect the dots in terms of seeing how their own behaviors and interactions in the world work” (Jean-Paul). While Layton and Jean-Paul remained relatively abstract in their examples, Cone provided a more concrete anecdote regarding how he felt that his students, and students in the United States at large, perceived the social world around them,

> I have this sense that students in the United States have a very particular worldview. And oftentimes, that we're exceptional, and we've always been a force for good, and that it's always kind of been one way. And I don't see the world that way. Right? I think it's just more interesting and more complex. And so, what I try to do is get them into different ways of seeing it. And it's not always from one perspective, like I have libertarian economists come and hang out with us too, right? But my sense is like, it's just so much more interesting when you're able to grapple with how complex this is (Cone).

Cone echoes Layton and Jean-Paul with respect to acknowledging the contradictions and complexities that make up the world, but also establishes that students in the U.S. often lack the curiosity to understand non-Western, Eurocentric perspectives. Cone does not address how much of that is to blame on U.S. educational institutions versus students exploring on their own, but regardless, he believes it is problematic and aims to break that down so that his students can begin to understand that the world is much more contradictory, complex, and nuanced that they make think, which may inspire them to utilize their critical consciousness to both understand those nuances as well as how they relate to them. Similarly, Charlene told me how she had her students analyze the California state standards, specifically what it meant to be a world history student in the state of California,
…we started keeping record of like what the whole goal was, and on their own they arrived to the realization that the state standards, basically we're teaching them how to understand Western political thought, because that's what it says in the standards and they connected that to understanding our role as folks in the U.S., rather than it being world history. They noticed that Latin America and Africa were only mentioned once in all of the state standards, and because it's an English and history class, we discuss a lot of materials, and they on their own arrived at the understanding of it being very deeply like an anti-Black kind of narrative because of how many people have left out from a world history perspective. So, for me, a lot of it is encouraging them to ask questions that they may not even come up with on their own. From also the mind that education is not neutral, right, so like from a very Freirean perspective education not neutral. And, and so for me, they're going to be exposed to all of these main ideas for the rest of their lives so it's my goal is to introduce them to ideas that they aren't necessarily going to be introduced to at some point (Charlene).

This is extremely important with respect to students developing a critical consciousness, because if they become aware that what they thought they knew is solely from a singular perspective, they will hopefully be inclined to be curious about other realms of their lives. As Cone told me, he hopes that his students think to themselves, “Oh, this thing that I thought I knew, I'm actually pretty sure I didn't know it well, and therefore I want to know more about it” (Cone).

While it’s important to introduce macro/global perspectives apart from Western modes of thought, Katie also indicated that it’s also good to consider micro-level differences in perspectives across students, as well as recognize that it is not the student’s fault necessarily for not knowing something,

I would feel really like upset with their answers or like I feel like you're not understanding a huge perspective, you know, and then later I was like, yeah, they totally didn't understand a huge perspective, that was not a fair question that I asked them. And it wasn't so much that I was mad at the answer that they gave me but that they didn't have enough information to really think about the question, so I think I know over the years that I absolutely want them to think critically, but we have to take them to a place where they have enough information to actually be critical thinkers, because there's something that can look like an imitation of critical thinking that's just opinion expressing (Katie).
Jean-Paul mirrored a similar wavelength of thinking into real-life experiences that his students were living, sharing how he would approach situations in which students weren’t empathizing with different perspectives,

I’d ask students questions like, what are we going to do if we fall off track? What about students that were not engaging in this way? What do we do when we have a student in our class that has a barrier, that's a barrier beyond their control? They're an English language learner. Would you be able to get through this course if it was being taught in Japanese, because you don't speak Japanese? No. Do you think that should be a reason why you fail the course? No, I don't think it’s a reason why I should fail the course I'm learning the language. Great. So why do you have a different standard for this student that's supposed to be your, your fellow student and cohort member? Why do we have these different standards in the U.S., than for other people? (Jean-Paul).

By engaging students in ways that they are able to understand that their experiences are subjective, thus lacking perspectives of others, Jean-Paul argues that students may be able to empathize with one another, encouraging the raising of their critical consciousness and ability to think more critically about what else they may not understand.

Mara also expressed that she spends time openly discussing perspectives with her students, “It's a heavy theme throughout all of my courses to talk about perspectives. And you know, and I say, you need to not only be aware of what perspective your book is taking, or the article is taking, or the media that your reading is taking, but like, we typically don't really know a lot about our teachers, and the perspective that they bring, like I said, I bring my own bias no matter what” (Mara). In conclusion, having the ability to recognize that learning is an ongoing process involving continuous unlearning and gaining of perspectives apart from one’s own is imperative to gaining a critical consciousness.
VI. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL SAFETY SHOULD BE A TOP PRIORITY

If students don’t feel safe, they are less likely to learn.

It has to be safe. But I didn’t do that through handholding, I did that sometimes through humor. I gave kids nicknames. They would tease me back. I mean, everybody knows I hate tomatoes, I would come up to my car, and there were cans of tomatoes stacked under the wheels of my car... (Layton)

A crucial aspect of raising students’ critical consciousness involves cultivating a space in which they feel safe and comfortable entering their growth zones, “students, we want them to feel free to express their emotions or thoughts, if they feel uncomfortable with certain subjects, then they should bring it up and we don't necessarily have to talk about those issues all the time” (Madden). Recognizing students’ comfortability is dependent on the teacher’s ability to be observant (as mentioned previously). However, there are other methods that can be utilized to contribute towards making the learning environment safe for all students.

Layton expressed the attention he paid to each student, as well as how he used humor to encourage them to feel comfortable in his classroom,

I had to see that every kid in front of me was in it was unique and different than the others. So that a story I would tell, I was always monitoring which kid was laughing and which kid was uncomfortable. And I would reach out to the kids who are uncomfortable. And if something surfaced in those, you know, I'd always have kids in my room talking at lunch, all the time. And if something surface that was really hard, I would get them to agree that I could tell their counselor, I would, you know, we needed to get more resources around them, but had to be safe. And some of that is getting them to be able to laugh at themselves. You know, where they would just blush and laugh at the same time because that's again, a function of being safe with themselves (Layton).

Thus, there is this notion of observance that is integral to recognizing when students feel safe to explore and grow. Similarly, Katie used the metaphor of a container when describing how she worked to make her classrooms feel safe for her students, insinuating that there is this balance or fine line that comes with taking on the role of creating such a space,
They want you to be their teacher. You know, they didn't sign up for like a support group. They want a leader. And yet, you need to be this person who invites authenticity, being personal, so you do that by, you know, if you are personal with them, they know they can be personal with you, but you also have a container like there's a line and I'm not going to let anybody go beyond that. You have to believe that the work you're doing matters and is interesting, and is going to impact their future, you know. You have to be curious, and you have to ask questions you authentically don't know the answer to that you want to know the answer to, you know (Katie).

Additionally, Mia added that there is often this pressure to be okay all the time, for both teachers and students, which is why it’s important to be transparent and create spaces in which you recognize, and they recognize that it’s okay to have a bad day. Mia explained that she often has one-on-one conversations with students who may not be “engaging with community” at the time and asks them how she can support them. Mia also shared that she usually is the one to instigate creating that space, but also works to decenter herself, allowing students to take an active role in creating the community they want to be a part of, explaining that she “opens it up to the students to see if they want to add more, you know, ask them like, ‘what does this mean to you as an individual?’ Start there, and then you know, ‘what does this mean for the people at your table? What are examples?’ And then have those class discussions. And some of it too, at least in the beginning of the school year, you know, you start with these with these discussions about expectations but sometimes like, you also have to be able to adjust them” (Mia). Regardless of how you choose to do this, it’s important to establish expectations and norms within the classroom so that students understand what to expect of you, what to expect from their peers, as well as to understand that such expectations are fluid as we all grow collectively.
VII. APPROACHES TO DISCIPLINE AND UTILIZING YOUR REAL AND ASSUMED POWER

YOU’VE GOT POWER, HOW DO YOU ENGAGE WITH IT?

...if a kid does break a rule, I don't really do anything except I stopped talking and then it gets deathly quiet in the room. And then I just stare at the kid (Lewis).

Whether teachers like it or not, students generally enter the classroom with an understanding that the teacher is their authority figure. Thus, it’s important to reflect on how teachers approach this assumed and real power they hold, disciplinary actions, and ultimately how they consider its impact on encouraging students to develop their critical consciousness.

While this is allocated an entire section on its own, Katie exemplifies how it’s helpful to understand how prioritizing relationship-building while thinking about discipline, “when it comes to discipline, like the first thing I do is relationship,” going on to say that rather than approaching students with anger, she consciously approaches students by having one-on-one ‘human conversations’ (Katie). The meaning of human conversation is ambiguous, but I would assume that to mean a conversation in which there is a mutual understanding that each are complex and multifaceted beings that should be treated with respect and dignity. Katie also indicated how she brings authenticity into the room through transparency regarding how the students’ words or actions make her feel, “it helps to have a talk with them and say, “This is what you guys are doing, you know you're not listening you're screwing around, and this is how it feels to me. You know, it feels like you don't care what I'm teaching, how can we fix this?” (Katie). Uitvlugt resonated with this, sharing that his goal is “to set up expectations as early as possible … I think, in general, you know, students see the teacher as kind of the one in control. But, you know, I also don't want to be abusive of that. So, I try to treat students as respectfully as
possible, treating them like people, and then in the hopes that you get treated like a person back” (Uitvlugt).

Another approach discussed included utilizing humor to catch the students by surprise. Mirroring Katie’s note about not approaching with anger, both Layton and Cone touched on the role that goofing around and making situations light-hearted helped them approach situations in which students were being disruptive. Layton agreed with Katie in that he also shared that in such situations where he feels like he needs to step in he would usually address them personally rather than in front of the whole class, “They have to be one on one accountability. And a teacher can do that. I mean, they're basically the tyrant. You don't do it with humiliation or anger. You can be angry, but you don't hurt with it” (Layton). Layton told me that a strategy he uses it to catch them by surprise by instigating cognitive dissonance, “I call a kid out in the hallway. And they're convinced I'm really upset. But the very first thing I asked them is do they like tomatoes or what are we going to do for lunch today? Totally dissonant to what the argument was, they instantly are confused so they're not defensive. The key to making things happen is sometimes there's what is called cognitive dissonance. You have to take them by surprise, the defense's drop” (Layton). Cone also expressed that himself and the students joke around a lot, but he is also clear about when he isn’t happy with the students, “I don't give a lot of homework, but if you come to class, and haven't done the work, like, I'm not happy. Like, I'm not gonna just like say, it's cool, because it's not cool. Because we're all ready to have a discussion and you didn't do your work. And like, when we're reading a book, like, I'm gonna get super pissed if I see the phone out because we’re reading this important text. But what I think happens, like you kind of get that stuff out of the way, the first week” (Cone). That being said, one of Cone’s motivations for utilizing his position is if students are doing something to stifle the learning environments of
others, “man, I think stakes are too high. Life is too short, like we have 180 days. Most of those days, let's be really purposeful about what we're doing” (Cone).

Both Lewis and Katie brought my attention to what they called the “warm demander” when thinking about how to approach and utilize their position of power. Lewis described this, saying “you have incredibly high expectations, and you are clear, you know, and you don't, you're okay with kids failing. I mean it's like kids need to fall. You don't hold their hands and save them all the time. Very clear expectations, yet at the same time, the students know you're very warm you care about them” (Lewis). Katie also told me about her use of the ‘warm demander’ approach,

…you can sort of be that person who's like prepared and safe and ready and probing …I mean it's just a careful blend of being with them, but also being like you're holding the space for them, you're making a container that's really safe for them, you're not just one of them, you're something a little bit different, you know, you're facilitating and making them feel really safe to be themselves and interested and curious and all that stuff. So yeah, I don't know. It's hard. But all you can do is make the space, and then see, sometimes the magic happens and sometimes it doesn't (Katie).

Apart from the warm demander technique, Lewis admitted that he honestly doesn’t have clear rules, other than keeping your phone away, which he told me was coming from a place of respecting the learning environment and the learning processes of those around you. He told me “if a kid does break a rule, I don't really do anything except I stopped talking and then it gets deathly quiet in the room. And then I just stare at the kid. And then the kid kind of realizes it already knows what they did wrong, but I'm not going to engage him in the game like I do that, I didn't do. I'm not gonna do that little game, and I'll just wait for them to put their phone away or whatever and then I just go back to teaching and then it never comes up again” (Lewis). Lewis also discussed that he makes an effort to give his students opportunities to be treated as adults and is transparent about that process,
‘X,’ I asked you once like 20 minutes ago stop talking, and I treated you like an adult, I was thinking you can manage yourself. I started lecturing again and then you choose to keep talking which means you're ignoring me now, or you can't control yourself and I don't know which one it is … you're taking the learning opportunity from all these kids, all of them, and now I have to step in because you're saying this was again control my mouth, because I don't take it personally, I like talking I wish I could talk all period, but everyone's educational opportunity is so powerful and important to me (Lewis).

Again, disciplinary interruption is coming from a place that is worried about the learning of the rest of the group. However, while Lewis later mentioned that if necessary he would write up referral slips to the office, Jean-Paul took a different approach with respect to referral slips,

“Factually speaking, I only would send kids to the office on what we call the ‘positive referral,’ which is I wanted their behavior to be known for how good it was, so I would write a positive referral, and send the kids to the office to explain why they were being sent to the office to share their amazing work. If there was a problem with a student, I never push that into the office. I wanted that to remain between the student and I, and how we dealt with it.” (Jean-Paul). It’s interesting to reflect on the impact that each of these strategies has on the students, and how the intention behind them may or may not be in line with the desired impact. Charlene made a point to differentiate between punishment and discipline, sharing that “discipline should never be punitive, discipline should always be, for the sake of learning, like fostering learning” (Charlene). Madden admitted that he has never been a fan of and sort of disciplinary action, and would instead try to foster a ‘mutual-respect’ environment,

I always viewed teaching as basically, you’re not really there for your paycheck per se, although that's fine, but you're really there to improve the students’ lives, and to make a difference with them. So, I think the students get it for the most part, I mean very rarely do we have discipline problems. And basically, it's the respect, and I'm not even so much looking for my respect, I'm looking for the respect of all of the students who are in the classroom. So, if the kids who are asked to leave the room or would have to be would have to face some sort of disciplinary type situation, would always be the kids who just are not being respectful of the whole school environment (Madden).
Finally, Charlene expressed that punitive responses often lead the educator or teacher to miss opportunities to understand and dig deeper as to where the actions of the students are coming from,

For that student, if I had just putatively sent him out and disciplined him just for the sake of repercussions, I wouldn't have been able to really truly dig deep and understand that it's because he doesn't believe in himself, right, and I don't see myself as a savior, don't get me wrong, like I'm not saying that at all, right, but in the sense of like really truly understanding the root causes of things is so vital and I think so often, as human beings, and as teachers we’re more reactionary than we are responsive. So, I think that's how we have to approach discipline as being responsive rather than reactionary (Charlene).

Charlene posits that punitive reactions and responses can create a larger psychological gap between the teacher and student, which can discourage trust and the ability for students to feel safe in exploring their critical consciousness.
VIII. TEACHING AS A POLITICAL ACT?

HOW MANY PERSONAL BELIEFS AND OPINIONS DO YOU SHARE?

...it’s almost unfair to some other colleagues who lost that reputation, and at that point they’re buried in it and there’s nothing they can do, where I could take a poo on the ground and people go, “wow that was so cool to see him do that, you really try to get them to be critical thinkers.”

(Lewis)

When I asked the teachers whether they shared their political opinions or allowed for political conversations to be had in the classroom, I got an array of responses. Cone expressed his own reflective process, sharing how earlier in his career he was more “didactic and direct” and preached that “you can’t be neutral on a moving train” (citing Howard Zinn), but he said that as time has gone by and as he has gained more experience, he is less and less impressed by people talking the talk and not walking the walk, sharing how he does the work and lets that speak for itself. Here is an anecdote he shared regarding what he means,

I had my students in this class do research projects in which they researched a case in which an African American citizen was killed by a police officer. Now, you probably get, that’s a very radical project, in some ways. That’s saying, these aren’t isolated, this is systemic, right? The fact that we can do an entire unit and every year, we can just come up with new cases, if we want to, it’s systemic. But see, I think if I was younger, I might have taken more pride from like, standing up there in front of the audience, because they present it to people and say, ‘This is systemic and blah, blah, blah’ instead of actually just kind of getting out of the way and letting the kids speak that letting the audience kind of discover it, that it’s not always about me and my having to show everybody I get kind of exhausted by that sometimes some colleagues (Cone).

Although Layton did not touch on whether or not he shared his own political opinions, he also expressed that he felt comfortable discussing political concepts in his class. Layton shared the way in which he pushed students to think critically about politics, however, shedding light on his intentionality, “Political is a concept of what is the answer we’re fighting about? That’s what politics is devolved to, sadly … So, it’s very spellbinding to get people to recognize the complexity of the problem. Because in simple solutions, they realize that they’re just not going
to work, they don’t fit. So that’s the key thing, apolitical is when you argue about solutions, learning happens when you argue about the problem” (Layton). Thus, in a way, Layton was encouraging his students to transcend the political binaries often created, to use their own creative inclinations to reimagine what the problems are to begin with. Here is an insightful anecdote regarding how he spoke with his students about the abortion debate,

Whoever has the most votes is going to win. We already know that. That’s the system. Let’s argue about the problem. And is the problem actually that critical? Is the problem, something that’s maybe just regional? Let’s look at the problem and see if we can agree that it actually is a problem. I did the best I could to get students to not, like, what was the I mean, there are some things there is no solution, like the abortion debate. You can’t have half an abortion. It’s either yes or no. Pro-life, pro-choice. You know, they keep trying to shift the line, eight weeks to 13 weeks to none, to with approval. I mean, they fight over this line, but the truth is, it’s yes or no. And I said okay, the tragedy is the abortion is the solution. What was the problem? Lack of birth control? Lack of knowledge? Lack of cultural conversation around sexuality? What was the problem, and what created the problem? (Layton).

Lewis’s response surrounded how he felt as though his authority influenced his students and asserted that he is fine with his students talking about politics in class but doesn’t feel comfortable utilizing his ‘pulpit’ to preach his own personal beliefs upon the students. Lewis also shared that regardless of the situation, regardless of whether or not he completely disagrees with the student, he will ultimately protect the minority voice(s) in his room,

I may have students in there that are in a minority in our school, where their parents were very pro-Trump and they are themselves considered republicans even though no one at that age really knows what the fuck is going on like, who they are and you know they’re developing … I’d have to keep those kids in otherwise I’m going to push them away so I could talk about things like equity or, you know, like women should be respected without actually calling his name out, so, it’s a fine line there, because I will ultimately protect the minority voice in my room and in this case it’s the trump kids you know (Lewis).

Katie and Lewis had a similar take on the question, as Katie also told me that she didn’t want to risk students not sharing their opinions if they thought it was going up against the authority of the teacher, thus, she told me that politically she never shares her opinions or positions,
It’s never helpful to show your politics … you do have a power I think as a teacher, which can be good or bad, so if I reveal my politics, well, I’ve just shut down conversation. People either agree with me, or they’re pissed because they disagree with me, so that’s an interesting piece. But if it’s a question that’s so open about, you know, should you be true to yourself or the community? Well, I think everybody’s position is valid, and everybody’s experience is different and so people can come up with scenarios, and they’re like, ‘Oh, that’s a great scenario, I’ve never experienced that’ (Katie).

Mara also expressed awareness when considering how her transparency in political opinions would influence her students. Thus, she told me that she values objectivity, and is careful in trying not to teach her students to think like her all the time. She is open about this process with them as well,

I want to give the most like the safest space and the freedom for students to be able to make their own judgments about things and to be comfortable with that judgment being not the same as mine, and to know that they can disagree with me, and that they can still be really smart, and like, critical thinkers … majority rules, minority rights, and I think that the dissenting opinion is incredibly important and incredibly strong. And having been in a minority, as like a woman and a woman of color, and most recently, as like a tele-working teacher was about to get, like not be able to telework anymore, I think it’s really important that the dissenting opinion is respected, and that people are able to voice that. And I always say, like, I’m gonna say this, and it’s not because I want you to do things my way because I know that I’m in the minority. But I think that this is an important voice to be heard (Mara).

Thus, Mara also parallels Lewis’s point regarding placing intention towards protecting the minority voice in the room, regardless of whether they agree or disagree with that voice.

Opposed to this, Mia and Charlene appear to be on the entire other side of the spectrum, who both vocalized that they don’t see anything wrong with having that sort of influence on their students. Charlene shared with me,

…we’re so focused on this idea of a value free education, that we’re not allowing people to develop those imaginations early, right? And most people aren’t having conversations about capitalism with their 10th graders, they’re just not. And I’m not saying that I’m a pro or anything, right, but I think that there is something to be said about introducing students, of all backgrounds and all ages, to unique and different thoughts that are not necessarily considered ‘value free,’ because we’re so afraid of instilling values in our students, but I don’t know, I don’t know that that’s a problem … I don’t think there’s been a single class that I haven’t talked about white supremacy, or racism, or ableism, or sexism or talked about, you know, transgender identity or, you know, some sort of
variation because I think that students will not be engaged if they don’t understand it (Charlene).

That being said, rather than fearing her values influencing her students, Charlene posits that this is going to happen anyways, that there is no such thing as a value-free education, thus teachers should be intentional and transparent about that and allow students to recognize she comes from her own perspective and that they can work on formulating their own too. This parallels Jaime-Diaz (2020) as well, who postulated that critical pedagogues should understand that teaching is a political act in and of itself, rather than an objective arena. Mia had a similar response and answered my question by first noting the irony in the question to begin with, “…the fact that this question is being asked, really speaks to how much white supremacy and sexism and ableism, have influenced our education system – capitalism – so, so, so, heavily that we can’t even talk about the social reality and dictate what happens” (Mia). Mia stated that she shares her own values for several reasons,

…even something like math and science, you know, things are supposedly value free are not, that we really need to talk about that. And I think that something. So yeah, something that we are asked to do as teachers a lot, is to focus on, on diversity, right? And that was so watered down that I feel like it’s actually becoming damaging because what we’re doing is we’re ‘otherizing’ our students, right? They are the ones who are different, and we need to be the ones to accommodate that. But we are never as teachers, or rarely, at least in my experience, able to unpack our own biases that we bring into the classroom or the experiences that have informed the way that we teach. And so, there’s a huge disconnect. Because in order to empathize and understand and show up in solidarity and talk about these, like, unjust, harmful, social systems, like we really need to be able to see where we are as teachers in it (Mia).

Again, there is no ‘right way’ to integrate one’s politics into the classroom (or not), but I hope that this section was helpful and provided multifaceted perspectives that may inform your own decisions regarding how you integrate your beliefs and values with class content.
IX. THESE THINGS MAY BURN YOU OUT: HERE’S WHAT THEY ARE AND SOME MITIGATION STRATEGIES

P.S. YOU WILL FAIL SO MANY TIMES & YOU WILL NEVER BE FULLY PREPARED

*Burnout comes early, the first five years or major you'll lose teacher in the first five years if you make it through the first five years, I think you got it... (Lewis)*

I want to dedicate the second to last section to burnout, because, especially in this pandemic, it is not something to brush over or ignore. If teachers are striving to raise the critical consciousnesses of their students, it is imperative that they are also doing everything possible to show up as their best selves, and that includes being aware that burnout is real and reflecting on some ways to best mitigate it. If anything, at the very least, I hope this section leaves you feeling less alone in the exhausting work you are doing or will do – we got this.

First of all, several teachers expressed that, in general, the beginning is probably going to be the hardest part of one’s entire teaching career. Cone opened up to me about some of the things that could bring you down, “It can bring you down, if you don't like your principal, it can bring you down, if you have that one kid, it can bring you down if you feel like you know, people, they come to your class with 10 seconds left, they don't really want to come. It can bring you down if you feel like you got these kids who are just always trying to go to the bathroom, then they're not buying into what you're selling” (Cone). Cone also told me that when you’re young, you’re just not very experienced and not very good, “…you will never really be a great first year teacher, you might be beloved, you might be charismatic, you might be fun, but that person who’s a great first year teacher, look at five years later, they're able to do so many more things, right? So, I think it's so hard to be a young teacher, because there's like this gap between what you're actually doing and then what you want to be doing. That was really hard for me at the beginning” (Cone).
Lewis also expressed some past difficult experiences, answering the question of whether he has ever had days where he has thought, ‘why the heck am I doing this?’, “I have not had a day like that in decades. It has really been a freakin’ long time. You do get those, let me warn you, you get those a lot at the beginning, because you don't have skills yet, you don't know how to connect yet, you don't know what the fuck you're doing yet, and it is hard, and there's grading, there’s how do you manage the workload, how do you manage everything. And on Sundays I would get bellyaches, I didn't want to go face them again because I felt like I was fighting them, you know. That's hard” (Lewis).

Layton warned that you’ve got to be patient with yourself because the bottom line is that a lot of what you are going to try to do is just not going to connect, “you can drop it and come back with a different approach… and won't do any good to try to pound it down their throat - just won't do any good. So, and then there were days my fatigue got in the way. That's for sure” (Layton).

Apart from being aware that it is going to be difficult at the beginning, they also shared some more specific things that can burn you out, regardless of where you are in the career. Cone emphasized that there are always so many meetings, and that he wishes he could instead utilize that time for planning. He also expressed that he honestly just found affluent, white parents to be a pain in the ass, and gave a funny and ‘crude’ analogy to explain why,

I've been burned out at times by affluent white parents, who I think just hound you, and hound you out of such privilege. I remember once I got an email from a parent, this might not seem important to you, but it struck me. The kid’s parents said, ‘my kids got a B, what can they do to improve?’ And I was like, are you fucking kidding me? We’re in the first week of the second quarter, we've had a five-point assignment and they got a four, and you're sending me an email about this? Like, I want to give an analogy, and I hope it doesn't sound too crude. It's a little crude, okay… I say sometimes, you know, it'd be like, if you were dating somebody, and you're like, ‘Oh, we have all these connections to each other, and it's awesome!’ And then they're like, ‘Can we just have sex?’ Like, they just want to go just to that base thing all the time. And sometimes with affluent white
students, and affluent white parents, I feel like it's that about grades. Like you'd like to think you're stretching them, they like the book, and they liked the trip, but the second you give them a bad grade... let me talk about this. And you just feel like they're hitting you over the head. So that's hard” (Cone).

Cone went on to explain that he ended up just changing his grading approach to generally give his students high grades, “Most people do the work. Most of the time I think the work is pretty engaging for all of us. And I no longer worry about the fact that like 80% of my students get an A” (Cone). Bouncing off of that, Cone also told me that it’s really easy to get burnt out by ‘fake woke people,’ expressing that this has taken a large tole on him before,

And then the summer it became sorta everybody was kind of paying attention to Black Lives Matter, and I felt like everybody vastly overcompensating, you know, my feeling would have been like, hey, if you haven't done any of this work, and you teach an AP class, literally, can you recruit one or two more Black kids to your class, like, that's actually a tangible thing that could help somebody, right? But instead, it's like, let's get a list of podcasts and a list of books and a list of films and spent a lot of time compiling a big ass list, as far as I know, no student paid any attention to over the summer. But everybody there felt super cool about themselves. Right? And then it's like, right after the inauguration, we had a faculty meeting. And, you know, there's question because it's February, like, ‘so how are you like, you know, trying to do a better job this year with Black History Month?’ And, like, everybody's like, I played the Amanda Gorman poem in class. And, you know, it's like, ‘Dude, it's not about that!’ It's not about the supplemental one-time thing. It's, it's not about playing hip hop in your class. It's not about having a Black Lives Matter sticker on your car. Like, all that's cool, cool. But the really cool stuff is like, doing work, that stretches kids to think about these issues, doing work with a diverse group of kids, doing work to bring in different voices to your class. I just feel like sometimes people want it so cheap, and, that kind of burns me out, I can get kind of petty about that (Cone).

In terms of some things that teachers can do to approach burnout, everyone provided a wide range of ideas which I know I found helpful, so I hope you do too. Although this maybe differ from person to person, Katie shared that it is helpful if you approach teaching with flexibility and optimism,

I think if you’re a person who can just like shift constantly, shift expectations, you need to be an optimistic person - So I say for me, I am an optimistic person. Like I said, I meet these kids that are not likable and I'm like, I'm gonna like you. I know that I will. I don't know how that's gonna happen, but I believe that it will. I think I do feel like I every day, reflect on what happened and think, Hmm, you know, how can I do that differently. So, a
willingness to shift and change and sort of like an optimistic belief that it can get better, you need to have that (Katie).

Similarly, Madden told me that he also tries to approach his classes with enthusiasm and patience,

…as long as you're patient, and you bring enough energy to the classroom, I think you can pretty much do whatever. And then, of course, being compassionate to understand, you know, people come from a lot of different angles, and you have no idea really what's happened in people's lives. So, always be willing to, you know, embrace new challenges with students. I certainly think my goal every day is just to bring, not only the students to bring the energy and stuff like that, it's really the teachers, they have to be the people who inspire the kids, and to make, you know, and to make that sort of difference (Madden).

One thing you can control is how you approach your practice every day, as well as reflecting on whether the mindset you practice is beneficial to your own mental health. Apart from internal mindset, Layton and Jean-Paul also indicated that it’s really important to develop peers that are also teachers so that you can relate to them in that way and empathize with one another’s experiences. Layton prioritized getting himself connected to a peer group, sharing, “you'll need to develop friendships within the schoolhouse and the teachers who don't and only have their friendships outside of the schoolhouse, become very disconnected. They come in, they teach your class, and they leave. And they don't participate in things in the schoolhouse. You need to develop the circle of people who are teaching. It's essential” (Layton). Lewis also mentioned this, saying that camaraderie with staff is huge, “I've always had good camaraderie with my staff, you have fun and laugh with your colleagues, because then you're all in it together. That one is huge” (Lewis).

Jean-Paul agreed that it’s important to connect with a peer group, but explained that it’s also good to have peers outside of your schoolhouse,

I established informal networks of other teachers, not at the school site. So that way, it wasn't something where you're dealing with whatever is the drama and the teacher’s lounge, or people talking about, you know, what the retirement packages are looking at or
other things I wanted to keep my focus on kids and teaching, so I kept an informal network that I would interact with, and frankly, to this day, I have several informal networks of school superintendents and leaders that I still interact with on, this is gonna sound silly, on a daily basis, like, I have, like four WhatsApp room groups that are established and you know, people check in on a daily basis. I various other networks, so that way, we're just… we're not spiraling out of control alone (Jean-Paul).

Layton also shared that as a teacher you can’t expect the students to sustain you, “That is a) you don't want the energy and b) it's inappropriate. You don't use the students as your support group in any way. They can get you jacked up in their success makes you go home just dancing on a head of a pin, you're so excited. Great. But when you're down, it's never with students” (Layton).

Katie touched on recognizing that it’s easy to blame the students for when you’re feeling burnt out, and although it’s okay to process those feelings, it’s ultimately up to you to make changes to your practice to make it more sustainable for you, “it's easy to blame them. And I do sometimes I'll come out of class and be like “God they were so lame today.” But I know that it's not them, it's me. So, then I have to always have the attitude of, like, what can I change? What can I tweak?” (Katie). Piggybacking on that note of reflection, Jean-Paul also told me that it was really helpful for him to consistently reflect on his teaching practice,

…depending upon where I was in my career, one was making sure that there were times of the day that I was expressively focused on studying the craft of teaching. Every day. I used to record my teaching practices, I used to play them back. I used to ask for feedback. And so really honoring the craft and tradition to making sure I was getting better at what I was doing, and I wasn't just working harder … the most important thing I did was very early on, as I set aside, daily and weekly structured time for critical reflection, on my own practice, and what I was doing for students and families. And by structured I meant, I mean, there was a daily thing, where 15 minutes was set aside, of just quiet time to really dive in deep on what's there. But every Monday before students arrived, I did about 30 to 40 minutes of really thinking about them and what's there … You know, depending upon your style, figure out what works for you, I used to do it with some just quick journal notes and leave myself so I could go back and trace and look at what was there. But the point was, is that you would critically reflect (Jean-Paul).

Waller et. al. (2017) shared this as well, pointing to the importance of reflecting on oneself as being integral to the more general teaching reflection. Along with Mia’s also point that teachers
can construct their year in a way that makes it so they don’t have to grade everything, others commented on the importance of exercise. This can look different depending on what you enjoy, but something you can do to get your body moving is critical to remaining mentally healthy.

Jean-Paul told me that he would try to note signs of exhaustion, saying that he went through different phases, “I'm in COVID phase right now, so there's not a lot for me to do. But there would be times where I would run five miles a day or go spend time at a gym for an hour and a half. It depended on where I was in my life” (Jean-Paul). Lewis also mentioned this, sharing that it is beneficial “have outside activities where it's not all about what happens in there, be physical, go on trips, hike, bike, laugh, play basketball, and have friends, and just balance work as a 30-year life. You know, don't make if you make it 80% of your life” (Lewis). Finally, Uitvlugt told me that he tried as best he could to leave his schoolwork at school, keeping the two separated for his mental health.

My strategy to avoid stress or burnout is to, as much as possible, leave my schoolwork at school … And, you know, I then it's like, I'm not wearing my teacher hat on the weekend, you know, that's, that's all Jason I'm doing just stuff for me and my family, you know, I'm working in my garden or, you know, playing outside with my kids, or, you know, doing whatever they want to do. So that, you know, my batteries get charged up, so that I'm not coming to school, just burned out and just tired. I think if, you know, you're not taking care of yourself as a teacher, you know, it's really hard to take care of your students, even in the most basic ways of just like, getting some information out there for them. So, let alone like, you know, caring about them as people… I think it's pretty essential to really take care of yourself. And so, yeah, using those breaks … it's something that's, you know, really good for me, but it also happens to be good for my students in a lot of ways too (Uitvlugt).

Ultimately, it is up to the individual teacher to know themselves and what works for their best burnout mitigation practices. However, I hope this both shed light and normalized that fact that burnout is extremely common and should not deter you from doing what you love.
X. INSPIRAGINATION: A FLUID CONCEPT

The last question that I asked my interviewees was what the word *inspiragation* means to them if they were to provide a definition. Below I’ve included all of their responses, I hope that you find them inspiring 😊

**Layton**

“…to inspire imagination speaks to the existential potential, not to the dark side is that you get to make it up every day. You get to redefine every day, that nature of the relationship that you have with people, you get to look at others, you get to watch a movie, and you just saw a conversation that just shocked you, it was so powerful and wonderful, and you let it then bleed itself into the rest of your life. The concept to inspire is easy: it's the idea that I have to let not only my own imagination, but other people's imaginations, inspire me, which is what teaching is. You know, that's, that's basically what we're doing. At least the way I like it is that I'm always imagining, well, “what did the author mean by this?” You know, I'm always having to make it up – you know, remember we're flying solo in the dark? I'm making it up as I go. Not as an excuse. But as literally as using your word and inspiring imagination. I am making the relationship up every day, to my work, to the planet, to my friends, my wife, my amazing grandkids… But I just like the idea, it's a complete gift of reimagining everything, every relationship you have. It's like, how often have I told my wife that I love her? Every day forever. You have you seize the moment. Right now, you take her by surprise. Okay, there's a flower which you didn't expect a flower, whatever it is. But it's it can be exhausting, because you would like to have more stability than that. But I don't think there is such a thing as stable. I'm not stable, as you well know. I'm getting old … Every relationship is up for redefinition. It's amazingly powerful … I always used it as it was the greatest act of celebration, is that every time we rethought something, we reaffirm something, we needed to let something go because it was now dated, it was not who I am anymore or whatever … that we have to celebrate our, our capacity to change. And if you have a professor who's constantly challenging you to look at what you are in the world, and it just because every time you do that, you change it, you change the relationship, you change the relation. But you got to celebrate it. You can't get overwhelmed with it. That's the great risk. Because the existential potential can become the existential crisis where it's too much. You don't know what you're supposed to do. Should I say yes, or no? I got two hands, but I still have to decide, I don't know what to do! And the answer is, “yes.” You don't know what to do. And you will have to decide.

**Cone**

“you help to create a space where people can get really excited. And that you're not sort of confined by a lot of previous iterations of schooling, or like “schooling has to be like this. You have to start with this, and you have to end with this.” And that not only are you seeking to do that as a teacher, but you're seeking to model it for students so that they can do that, with respect
to their own learning … So, it's like, for you, that professor got you so geeked up, right? Now you want to read books or see films, and um, I think that's one of the true hallmarks when someone's learning: when they want to learn more. Like on their own outside of class… And so, I, you know, you asked me earlier about sort of tracking student growth. And I'm not saying that's not important at all, I'm saying, I'm not very good at it. Right? And it's not at the top of my list. But I would think, like a nobler goal would be like, when that kid leaves your class, and it's not even, “do they keep pursuing Yemen?” But like, do they keep just thinking critically about the world? And do they keep seeking out that information?”

Lewis

“I love it. I tell you that when I was a kid, I had a poster used to get posters when you would go buy albums and Bob Dylan would write these songs. It would blow my mind and Bruce Springsteen would do it too. When I was younger, high school, and this poster came out about his profile, Bob Dylan. And it was black and white except he had this big Afro, and the afro was all these colors, like just every curl was like another strip interjected with white and it was like, I thought about that as soon as you said that word is. That is what is inspiration is the imagine the imagination. You have to inspire kids to kind of dream what they can be what their ceiling can hold. If everyone has a bubble about who they are, that bubble is only a certain amount, it only goes about six feet beyond them when you're in high school. They have no clue. The range of influence that bubble can expand to in all directions, until they start being pushed. And they realize they have opportunities, and they can imagine who they can be or what they can be. So, you know, I think that's what we do as teachers yes, we have content that's the vehicle that's the engine. But we're there to inspire, way more than we are to make sure they understand the distributive property.”

Jean-Paul

“an individual or situation that inspires you to perform at a peak level and be able to imagine new ways of being or new ways forward.”

Madden

“I would just say that, for me, it'd be like having a student be so excited about certain subjects that they would be willing to just jump into a new area of learning that they really maybe had not anticipated thinking about prior to that … I think it can happen in many ways, it can happen in subject material, or like right now I'm trying to plan, I mean I've already planned it, we're just trying to get the kids to go on this four day biking trip from Pittsburgh to Cumberland, Maryland on this rail to trail network for a four day trip in the last week in April and, you know, just trying to get them inspired to be like, “Oh, I don’t think I can really bike 150 miles,” but I'm like, “Yeah, no it's over four days of course you can do it, my 10 year old did it.” And, and to and to be like, think outside of their, you know, smaller confines.”

Uitvlugt
“knowing or hearing from a student or you know, even not hearing or knowing it, but like hoping that wherever students end up like whatever major, you know, whatever field of, you know, study or life, or wherever they end up that thing that came up in my class, whether I said it or not, you know, is, is coming back to them. You learn how to learn in college, and you kind of learn more about who you are and how you want to operate in this world. But like, that doesn't stop … it’s not going to hit every student in the same place at the same time, and they're going to walk away, just being inspired, and, you know, come up with all these ideas and how to solve these problems and stuff. But, you know, if down the line the seeds were planted, you know, and if it comes back to me, gosh, that'd be that'd be about as good as I could ask … That's inspiragination. You know, it’s planting seeds, you know, you can't expect to be inspired by the end of the school year, by the end of the class with me, but knowing that those seeds are planted and they're gonna grow into different things, because we're all different people… somewhere down the line, you know, people are making the world better because of what they learned or heard in my class.”

Katie

“I think it's that, fundamentally, you have to believe. You have to believe it's possible. You have to believe that there's something that you can do that can make it happen, and you have to be gentle with yourself that it's also sort of magical, so you can't… you got to just keep trying to get just get back up on that horse and try again. And if you have that approach, then they will probably come to you.”

Mara

“I guess the thing that pops into my head is like limitless, right? It's the same reason why oftentimes, like I don't give students normally like a number requirement for essays or even like how a product needs to be finalized. Like, you know, if I give a rubric and then I'm like, but really like you, you however, you want to take this information, and then give it back to me. And so I guess that's what I think of when I hear that word, and I get that students want examples, and they want concrete answers, and they want to know their expectations, but sometimes our biggest moments of growth sometimes come when we're uncomfortable, and we're taking risks, and when we don't know what it is exactly that we're doing. And so like, that's also what that word kind of encompasses, to me is this idea that, I have freedom, maybe it's freedom, that word it is like, I'm inspired, and I have this freedom and this imagination and partly like, again, I guess going back to that, like Star Wars analogy, belief, right? I mean, if we, like part of, I think to the thing with students, and Student Government is like, all we need, all they need is somebody to believe in them, that they can do it, that they have the ability to do it. And I feel like when I first started doing it, it kind of was like, I felt sometimes like I was trying to convince people, yes, they can do this.”

Charlene

“I think that, like not to be repetitive and using a word to define another word, I think that, for me, it's not to be the one to inspire but like to be the inspiration but rather to inspire the imagination, right. So, I am a firm believer that we lose our imagination as we get older, not
because we lose elasticity in our brain like some people will tell you, but because we're encouraged to conform. And the more you conform, the less imaginative you're going to be. And so, I think for me that word really like kind of encompasses the idea of fostering creativity and imagination, for the sake of your own personal endeavors and inspirations, as opposed to it being you being the inspiration of imagination.”

Mia

“…remind them that they have strong, powerful, and important voices. And that they have so much ability to harness that and to craft that and to learn more. And really just empower them to use their voice, whether that is, you know, finding their voice among so much marginalization, or finding their voice as an ally and an advocate and accomplice … To me, it sounds a lot like really just inspired curiosity… to where students are looking at the world and they're asking why. They're wondering about things and things as they are, and as they have been, but also what they could be.”

But the real question is, what does inspiragination mean to you?
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

My cat, Fig, meows at the birds outside every day. He stares at them, unwavering, and as they chirp back, I was wondering, is this an act of kitty insanity? An inability to learn that there’s no point in saying hi? Or is it an act of resilient belief that maybe one day he could play among them? I’d like to think the latter, but I guess I’ll never know.

Throughout this paper, I would stop writing as soon as I felt as though I was writing without intention. That being said, I stared at this conclusion page for about 15 minutes and decided I should just write exactly what I’m thinking first, and that is, there is no definite ‘conclusion’ to this research, and that’s what makes it so beautiful. I’ve obtained various strategies, practices, ideas, perspectives, opinions, and more, and I want to also acknowledge that this journey is just gettin’ started. But most of all, I hope that you were inspired to imagine.
BOOKLIST

The last question I asked was whether there were any books that either inspired them, used for teaching, or just meant something to them. Below I’ve included a list of those mentioned either directly in response to the question, or indirectly throughout the interview. Some teachers also went into detail as to why it meant so much to them, which I have also provided if applicable.

- *To Kill a Mockingbird* – Harper Lee
- *Discovery of a Father* – Sherwood Anderson
- *Winesburg Ohio* – Sherwood Anderson
- *Slaughterhouse Five* – Kurt Vonnegut
- *Cat’s Cradle* – Kurt Vonnegut
  - “Anything by Kurt Vonnegut … who used to just simply say, so it goes. There are some things out there that are way beyond your control. And it's much nicer to look at it and smile. It's beyond your control” (Layton)
- *The Monkey Wrench Gang* – Edward Abbey
- *The Nickel Boys* – Colson Whitehead
- *Mountains Beyond Mountains* – Tracy Kidder
  - “That to me, had as big of an impact on my teaching is like kind of anything. You know, like you're like, inspiragination, Did I say that? Right? Okay. Because I felt in when I saw him, it's like, I don't mean to be grandiose, he's a million times cooler than anything any teacher will ever do. But I felt a kindred spirit. Like, I felt like, oh, here's somebody who sees this system, and realizes it's just not working for a lot of people. It doesn't have to be this limited. And yeah, that that book was just, it rocked my world like, yeah, that had an enormous impact on my thinking” (Cone).
- *Epic Measures* – Jeremy Smith
  - “And I'll tell you the reason I love that book is because I think so many of my students are like, Oh, the way you change the world is to be a doctor. But my feeling is like, I don't know. I mean, what kind of doctor are you going to be? Right? You know, and there's a lot of ways to change the world, I really believe you can be a teacher who exerts an enormous fucking influence on the world. I think you can be a data nerd who saves so many lives. And, again, I find that inspiring it's like, you know, if you have this, if you have this real desire to get something important done, you can. May not be linear, may not be easy, may not look like the way your friends or parents think it should, but, yeah, you can” (Cone).
- *Lord of the Rings* – J.R.R. Tolkien
  - “That was incredibly influential incredibly about storytelling and bravery and, and, you know, all that kind of stuff about the battle of good and bad” (Lewis).
- *Cry Freedom* – Steve Biko
- *Cry the Beloved Country* – Alan Paton
- *My Traitor’s Heart* – Rian Malan
The Road – Cormac McCarthy

No Country for Old Men – Cormac McCarthy

The Power of Their Ideas - Deborah Meyer

“...kind of reminded me of how incredibly powerful student voice can be within design concepts” (Jean-Paul).

The End of Education – Neil Postman

“you know, to really get into some of Postman's concepts of you know, we're not really sure why we have schools, you know, so, if you feel confused at times, and you're not really sure about what's there, don't worry about it. You know, nobody's knocked it out in the last, you know, 2000 years, so don't feel like their burdens on you” (Jean-Paul).

The Warmth of Other Suns – Isabel Wilkerson

Caste – Isabel Wilkerson

A People's History of the United States – Howard Zinn

Sand County Almanac – Aldo Leopold

“...just like it's all about kind of like being observant and like paying attention to what's, you know, kind of going on around you. I think, I think we all just get so busy. And we have like so many other things to do that we forget that like, you know, there's so much happening, you know, weather is happening in birds, are migrating and you know, answer waking up and you know, doing their thing and it's, there's so much going on. That's like, so real, you know, and we just we kind of are trained in so many ways to ignore it” (Uitvlugt).

Harry Potter Series – J.K. Rowling

Multiplication is For White People – Lisa Delpit

Daring Greatly – Brené Brown

The Hate You Give – Angie Thomas

American Born Chinese – Gene Luen Yang

Pedagogy of the Oppressed – Paulo Freire

The Giver – Lois Lowry

Borderlands – Gloria Anzaldúa
TRANSCRIPTIONS

Below are the transcriptions of the interviews. The words on this paper cannot pick up on the laughs, smiles, sarcasm, or other emotions and significant communicative bits that were present throughout the interviews conducted 😊

LAYTON

Recording Begins

Kiera 0:01
Do I have your consent to record this interview?

Layton 0:04
Yes, you do.

Kiera 0:06
Okay, thank you. Okay, so we'll just get started. There's some preliminary questions. So, if you'd like me to use a pseudonym for you…

Layton 0:18
No, you can use my name.

Kiera 0:19
Okay, and then if you're comfortable sharing, what is your gender identity and what pronouns do you use?

Layton 0:27
I'm a he, I'm old, I'm white.

Kiera 0:31
Yeah, perfect. And then would you consider yourself a young adult, middle aged, or a senior?

Layton 0:43
The age is senior, young adult is the attitude.

Kiera 0:50
Okay, so now we've got some background teaching questions. So, what is your educational background? Where did you get your B.A., and where did you get your teaching credential?

Layton 1:03
I got my B.A. from Evergreen, the Evergreen State College. I was there when the school opened. And that was comical and so entertaining because the school wasn't finished. So, the dorms weren't completed yet. We were living in tents. And it was just hilarious. The reason I chose this school is that it was… the learning was not in towers; you go from a math class to a science class to an English class. It was 100% interdisciplinary… what they call coordinated programs. So,
we'd have three to five faculty from different disciplines. And they had established an area of focus, and essential questions that they asked all the disciplines to try to answer from their perspectives. And it got very difficult. They were so hopeful at the start that the math and the sciences and the liberal arts could find common questions. But outside of ethical questions like, ‘what is the ethics of euthanasia,’ much less the process, I mean, it was difficult for them to cross. But it became very important even in the math and sciences, that if you were looking at developing a new oh, insect treatment or something to do with farming, you really did have to say, ‘Okay, if I impact this side of the planet, what is it going to do on this side of the planet?’ And so suddenly, you had a chemist really having to listen to a biologist, who was really listening to a political scientist about the legalities of culture and law. So those, that's why I chose the school. So anyway, when I first graduated, I had always wanted to be a teacher, but I was terrified by the vow of poverty… so I worked in the seafood industry, which is how I put myself through college. But even then, I knew I had to go back. So, after four years of being - or three years of being out, I went to the University of Washington to get my teaching credentials, and I chose it because what they called ‘tech-flow’, which meant every quarter I was in the classroom teaching, it increased every quarter, but the old model used to be everything at the university and then suddenly your last quarter, you were thrown into the deep end in a public school classroom. The first quarter I was there for an hour a day. Second quarter, I was there for three hours a day. So, it just built up until I was ready. So, I knew I needed some seasoning.

Kiera 4:15
And which subject did you teach in high school? And how long did you teach at the high school level?

Layton 4:21
I taught the first five years of my career in seventh grade. I like the beast. They have an attention span of about five minutes. And so, you have to design your lessons very differently. You have to you have to recognize what's in front of you. I've always said if you can teach Middle School, you'll never have a problem with classroom management. And then for the next 35 years I taught high school. Going through my credentials, even though the bulk of my credits were poli-sci, I was I had one of the original, not original, but I was the last … I once I got it, I was legally able to teach any subject any grade level. That is very appropriately long since gone away. So I mean, one year I from one semester, I taught ninth grade PE. one semester at the middle school, I taught woodshop. I taught geography for a semester, but that was mostly because they couldn't find anybody else, and they looked at the guy who had a certificate that I could legally teach anything.

Kiera 5:38
What was that called? I think it glitched out for a second. What was that certificate called?

Layton 5:42
Well, we nicknamed it the golden certificate, but it was called an ‘All Encompassing Certificate of Education.’ K through 12, any subject. So, but the bulk of my credits were in political science, literature. When we reviewed all of the stuff that I studied, I had enough credits more than enough in psychology, political science, and literature. And I chose literature because I like to teach through stories. And I found that to be… it matched how I think, we think.
Kiera 6:40
Okay, and then you said you'd always wanted to be a teacher, but was there anything that
inspired you to be a teacher or have any mentors that heavily influenced that journey to
education?

Layton 6:55
Well, it was one of those classic, ‘Yes and No’s.’ I grew up in a small farm town in eastern
Washington. And we had more agriculture teachers than we did English teachers. Only one out
of five of my classmates went to college. So, it was it wasn't anti-intellectual, but it was just anti
school. And so, when you found a teacher there, who was inspiring, it was stunning. And I had
one and he was brilliant. And I guess to remember, when I was a senior, he and his family
decided to move to Seattle area. And so he resigned after four years in our in our high school,
and as the protocol was, he appeared before the school board for an exit interview. And they
asked them, said “Mr. Shafiq, if, if you have any suggestions of how we can improve the high
school, could you let us know?” And he smiled and said, “Yes, on Monday, have all the students
lined up on the south side of the building, and tell them to push very hard.” He was always
certainly full of himself. But he was, again, one who believe that learning isn't memorizing. And
then the last one was when I was at the visiting my grandparents in Seattle, I went out to the new
district and went to their bookstore. And here was this book on a shelf and I had to buy it. And it
was called Teaching: How to Corrupt America's Youth. I was committed to that activity.

Kiera 8:41
So you bought it and read that?

Layton 8:49
Oh, yes. Yeah.

Kiera 8:52
I've heard of that book. Okay, perfect. So, thank you. N we're going to go to the main teaching
questions that are going to revolve around your pedagogy. So, do you try to inspire critical
thinking or critical consciousness raising within your students and how? Or what would you say
that your teaching style or pedagogy consists of?

Layton 9:22
I've been thinking about how we could start that conversation, Kiera. And I think most people
assume that learning is gaining knowledge or gaining skills. So, they have you practice the skill a
lot, or memorize a lot of the knowledge. I've discovered most 16-year-old kids are sound asleep
after about 20 minutes of that. And there's a reason. And it's because even the skill, you know, if
you learn how to do equations, in math, you still don't know what the hell you're going to do with
those equations in math. So, there's no connection to the kid’s future. And I think that a lot of
adults pay lip service to that. And I also found the idea that a 16-year-old, knew what their future
was what, which was a pretty false statement, so why even try to do that? So I went with what I
believe to be a simple truth of living in the world today, and that is, you have to grow
comfortable with and even excited by contradictions. And I chose contradictions that the students
would admit that they felt so I can, I can remember asking, you know, “how many of you would
like to go to a good college?” and most hands went up, “and how many of you are just exhausted and so irritated by the nonstop homework?” And all the hands went up. I said, “Wait a minute. You don't get one without the other. How do you possibly live with that contradiction?” And they smile, and say, “well that’s true.” And I said, “No, you're not answering the question. How do you live with the contradiction?” And it took them a while before they realized that's what they were doing. And some students began saying, “I get really stressed is what I do. I'm afraid of the future, I won't get into the school, and so I don't sleep well.” And then another student said, “well, the bulk of us, we cheat. We copy each other's homework. You know, I didn't have time last night to get the stupid Spanish stuff done.” So, we began looking at how we live with contradictions. And I said, the problem, of course, is nobody wants to admit they have contradictions. So, I said, “Let's take another one: It's a Friday night, you have a date, you're really excited about, then your best friend calls and they're in tears, and they need you to come by, and out of nowhere, your favorite grandmother's coming for dinner. Which one do you do?” And they went through and I said, “Okay, how would you approach that problem?” And I still remember several students wanting to do the basic spreadsheet to see which of those three choices had the ‘most points.’ Like one kid said, “Well, how rich is grandma?” They needed to identify what are the pluses and minuses of every part. And I said, “Okay, you're still going to then force yourself to choose one thing. What will you tell the other two people? You apologize, or whatever. I said, but if we learn to live with those contradictions, contradictions or conflicts, we can get excited about the solution. So if you could turn to your date, and said, “How about we start an hour late? I need to go over and see my friend, find out why they're in tears.” You say, “Grandma, are you spending the night? If so, I'm going to make you the best breakfast in the world.” You instantly realize the conflict doesn't mean there's no solution. But you have to admit, part of you wants to do this. *holds up two fists* Why do you have two hands? Because this hand wants to do this, this hand wants to do something different? And so if we view everything in teaching, as “Okay, what are the inherent conflicts and ask the students to explore the conflicts, because then they begin to understand why perhaps, leaders in the past made the decision they made. I mean, the greatest conflict that's in the news of late, of course, is Thomas Jefferson who brilliantly wrote every document, saying we cannot have slavery. I mean, the original declaration of independence said it must end and yet he owned slaves. And all evidence says he was very in love with one of his slaves and traveled with her to Europe took her with him, not as a slave, but as a lover. And how do we explain that conflict? Do we just try to erase him from the history books and say he was clearly a racist, slaveholding bastard? And yet, there are these other sides. So, I think it's interesting to explore how did he live with that contradiction that he clearly he struggled with his whole life. Okay, next question.

Kiera 15:43
How much of ‘you’ do you display to your students? Or in other words-

Layton 15:50
- tell my own story?

Kiera 15:51
Yeah. Like, do you grapple with wearing your teaching hat and your “Layton” hat at the same time? And where do you draw the line?
Well, I think that's a great question. And every teacher has to figure out where the line in the sand is. And I can still remember always trying to explain one of the beauties of one of the Greek city states was the construct called a polis. The polis was a gathering of citizens, and the concept was that they would all gather to make decisions as a group, but the truth was in their writings is they realized, I don't even know myself until I go and talk to someone, and they hand me back, a reflection or a question that I didn't know. So, in the teaching, I discover a lot about myself, not in relationship to the kids, but in relationship to the content. So that's why, for example, every year I deleted every quiz, every test. At the end of the year, deleted them all off the computer, because I needed to come back that next fall, realizing I had evolved, and maybe I was now reacting to a part of a book or an event in current events that I needed to somehow incorporate in that year. I think that students could smell a phony in under three minutes. And the classic way to be a phony is to teach the same thing year after year after year, because it's stale. I teach the same book, but I'm not going to teach it the same way. So ultimately, I teach and you knew this by telling stories. I would talk about my own growing up, I students asked me you know about Vietnam, how that played out my little community. I believe it's important to honestly tell the stories. That doesn't mean I don't embellish the stories. I teach fiction. Of course, I'm going to add things. Of course, I'll leave things out. And I tell everybody that I do that, and my teaching partner crack cups, and goes, “that story was much better this year.” So that's okay. Because it's the impact of the story. I'm not a historian. But, the line in the sand was always about my personal family (unless they were fun things like I would tell stories about my daughter's making sure they were ones that were okay to tell.) And they always would howl, “you told it again!” And I said “yes, but I told it much better this time.” And there are some things from the past in my private life that some kids would ask, “you know, did you?” and I say, “you know, that's a fair question. But would you ask your parent that question?” And they said, “No!” And I said, “Okay, so let's agree. That's not quite the time.” I can try give an explanation about how I discovered this line in the sand. I was really enamored with oral histories. I learned that at Evergreen and were every year we would charge to find people and capture their stories. So, I did my father. And for 29 Tuesday's in a row, we met and I recorded my father telling me his story. I still have those 90-minute memory, cassette tapes, I still have those, so I always have my father's voice. But we got to a point where it was time to tell me about the divorce with my mom, which I was certainly supportive and understanding of and he smile said you're not old enough for that story. And I realized, okay. He needs this to remain private either a was none of my business or be he still wasn't sure he was still sorting it out. And I was not the person to sort it out with. Oh, and I think most teachers can very quickly draw that line. What they cannot do is be afraid to tell some of their story. A teacher who, you know, and I won't say her name, was terrified of driving across bridges, and is you know, we live on an island. And she would get to Agate Pass bridge, and her husband would have to get out, he would drive across the bridge. And she could keep going. And I said, “Have your students ever asked you about this?” And she said, “No, that’d be too embarrassing for them to know.” And I said, “Why?” Every kid out there has a phobia, every kid has to be able to live with that fear. For me, it's dancing, I would rather be shot than have to dance. But regardless, I can speak in front of 10,000 people, but dancing? No. So I said, you just need to be able to tell the stories so they see a) the struggle, and you're able to learn to live with it, but also see the humor of how silly we are as people as we try to live with the things we like, or the things we fear. So she finally started telling some of her students about her fear. And those stories were hilarious. They were great. So again, you have to figure out what
is the intent of telling the story. You're not trying to become their best friends. You're trying to show them that there's a way through the confusions, and through the contradictions. Next!

Kiera 21:57
Okay, what are the social norms within your classroom? And how do you influence these norms? Do you have strategies to do this? Do you break those norms? Have your students? How do you respond?

Layton 22:20
Well, social norms are different than, meaning ‘that's the norm,’ versus what is the better way to be. And so, I had to make sure the room was safe. Otherwise, we couldn't talk about conflicts and contradictions that are at a personal level. It has to be safe. But I didn't do that through handholding, I did that sometimes through humor. I gave kids nicknames. They would tease me back. I mean, everybody knows I hate tomatoes, I would come up to my car, and there were cans of tomatoes stacked under the wheels of my car. So, you make it so that, that it's a safe room. And it also meant that I had to see that every kid in front of me was in it was unique and different than the others. So that a story I would tell, I was always monitoring which kid was laughing and which kid was uncomfortable. And I would reach out to the kids who are uncomfortable. And if something surfaced in those, you know, I'd always have kids in my room talking at lunch, all the time. And if something surface that was really hard, I would get them to agree that I could tell their counselor, I would, you know, we needed to get more resources around them, but had to be safe. And some of that is getting them to be able to laugh at themselves. You know, where they would just blush and laugh at the same time because that's again, a function of being safe with themselves. But there were some things that I would never accept. I can remember there was one day I got 60 kids in front of me and I'm, doing some Layton, ‘la la land lecture’, but I look at this kid who's in the third seat in front of me and he's clearly fixated on this young woman's backside. And she keeps it leaning over to talk to the person in front of her, exposing more of her backside than she probably realizes, and he makes some cheap comment about how she looks good and purple. And I stop and I smile and everybody trying to figure out what's going on, but they can tell I am not happy. You've seen that look. And so, I turned to him and I said, “I need you to raise your right hand.” And he does. And he's very worried. And I said, “you keep talking like that. That's the only thing you're ever going to get a date with.” So, you need to call people out on them. And you say that behavior is unacceptable. Now, sometimes I'd call them I'd be really frustrated. And I call a kid out in the hallway. And they're convinced I'm really upset. But the very first thing I asked him is, do they like tomatoes? Or what are we going to do for lunch today? - Totally dissonant to what the argument was, they instantly are confused so they're not defensive. The key to making things happen is sometimes there's what is called cognitive dissonance. You have to take them by surprise, the defense's drop. And then I say, “Okay, you know why we're out here?” They go, “Yeah, I screwed up. I shouldn't have done that.” I said, “Okay. We're going to go in now and I'm going to pretend to still be really mad at you. And then I'm going to pretend to give you a Saturday school detention.” So, we walked in still mad at each other – pretend. But she was able to admit she screwed up, she shouldn't have been doing what she was doing (which was copying somebody else's quiz) and we moved on. So, the social norms are have to be addressed, personally. That's the only way that everybody recognizes you're going to be held accountable to the decisions you make. They have to be one on one accountability.
And a teacher can do that. I mean, they're basically the tyrant. They can single out anybody. You don't do it with humiliation or anger. You can be angry, but you don't hurt with it.

Kiera 27:15
And what role does discipline play in your teaching style? And how do you engage with the assumed and real power that you hold as an authority figure in the classroom?

Layton 27:36
The key that I always tell them is that I, this is not a democracy. The classroom is my, my little fiefdom. But that the ultimate authority is that I direct the conversations. You guys can take it left and right and in a circle, but we're going to get to where I want us to get. And so every day that I walked into a classroom, I tried to arrive with five questions that could not be answered in the book. So we will have read Great Gatsby. And one of the questions I would ask is, “do we have any responsibility to take care of the poor?” And everybody would go, “wait, what, what? and I’d say, “well, what I saw the book kind of dances around the fact that Gatsby's wealthy, but it's based in a time period when there's great poverty, Fitzgerald ignores it. Is that okay? That we ignore poor people? How many of you walk by the guys, you know, with little sign out? Can you spare a dime when we get off the ferry boat?” So, you come in with those five questions. There are sometimes have a monitor called essential questions, but the answer is not in the book. But as the conversation grows, to what they've experienced to what they see going on in the news, I bring it back to the book. I said that Gatsby was incredibly poor, and he became self-made, but he did it through crime. Does that change your answer? So again, five questions. I control those, I control where the conversation is going to end. That's my ultimate authority. How they answer, it's totally there’s.

Kiera 29:37
So, I feel like that's kind of like how you connect the lessons or books to the real world. In a way it sounds like… so are there any other strategies you use to do that?

Layton 30:00
Well, the most important thing is to when you look at the literature, is there something in there that still related to today. So, for example, one of the greatest books ever written is, To Kill a Mockingbird, I love To Kill a Mockingbird. And clearly, there's a powerful theme in there dealing with the racial struggles of the South, especially during this time period. You've got Calpurnia, who is a fierce authority in that house, but she also knows she's a servant. I mean, she just takes the kids to the Black church. And just I mean, she's an incredibly powerful woman. And I'm going through this, but I'm also recognizing Atticus, as a single parent. And I know I probably have a third of the kids in front of me, who have either gone through divorce or are being raised by a single parent. And so, I chose to, every year I taught that, to do right in the middle of the book, before it shifts to the trial, where the kids are recognizing how unique Atticus is. And so you have to be able to stop the book and take on these tangential things that connect to the kids. And so, we read some essays, and some other short stories about father, there's one by Sherwood Anderson called, Discovery of A Father, where this boy is embarrassed by his dad, the dad's kind of the town clown, pretends he's this and that, everybody loves him, buys drinks, but he's embarrassed. And he's hoping that truth is he was adopted, or there was a mix-up in the hospital. And then one day, in the middle of a storm, his dad comes home, and he
is sopping wet, and his son looks up and doing homework and gives that look of contempt of his father. And his dad just turns to him says, “Come with me” and they go out in the storm. And they stand in this storm, and then they go down to the pond. And then the father says, “swim with me” and they get in the water in the storm. And he just holds on to his father's shoulders because he knows he's about to die off… but he feels how strong his father is. That to be the man he is in the community during a hard time like this, he'd much rather bring joy and laughter, and the kid just discovers this, as the title says, “I just discovered my father.” And so, you can take Atticus, when the son realizes that, yeah, his dad can’t throw a football or a baseball, but he says I'm going to grow up to be like, Atticus, I want to be a good man. So, then I transfer that to the experience that you would have with a single parent or with which parent you feel the most distant to, not the closest to, the most distant, and to look at that distance. So that's what I do. Or did.

Kiera 33:17
How do you, or do you, attempt to integrate creativity within your classroom?

Layton 33:32
I don't. I watch all these teachers, you know, bring in collages and murals and, paper machete and dance, and I'm going… No. It was a great weakness of mine, it was a flaw in my teaching, and I owned it completely. And somebody said, well, you need to explore, you know, American art, at least to teach America and I said, Okay. And I would go find people who knew something about it. And I'd have guest lectures and they, you know, bring them in and, and they'd all admit that, you know, it's a shame that my students were deprived of a good education because I knew nothing about it. So, some of the things I did, do you remember when we did the movie project? I would try to find expressions of creativity via in music, because it grew into the American Music Project, American movie project, and I was pushing it at the end, we needed to have an American fashion project. Look over the decades and centuries how men’s and women clothing were changed and who was in charge of designing women's clothing because I was being the father of two daughters, I was really angry. Every time I turned around, women's clothing had to be smaller and tighter. And I said who was in charge of this? So, I didn't ask the students to be creative, but I would ask them to look at creativity and see if they could see what was behind it.

Kiera 35:22
Awesome. And then how do you kind of buzzword, but how do you define progress? And how do you assess student progress?

Layton 35:32
Progress meaning student learning or American?

Kiera 35:38
Student learning.

Layton 35:58
I think, since my goal was to look for complexity of argument, in all my writing, do you remember writing, but “what is the thing?”
Kiera 36:38
I think about that all the time. There is so much freedom in that.

Layton 36:45
Uh, huh. Yeah, and which is I mean, existentialism is 100% the embracing the ideas that there are no restrictions except self-imposed. So, I was determining that I knew the students were growing and learning and junior year is a pretty powerful brain development pattern. I probably couldn't do a lot of the stuff I was doing with the eighth grader, just they just wouldn't have been ready for it experientially or the rest. But I was looking for complexity of argument. And so one of the things I did said you have to find an argument that totally disagrees with you. And then look at it, take it apart, see if there are some things that you could say, okay, that part of their argument I agree with. That's what I knew they were looking for complexity, again. Like this part of his argument, I hate this part of the argument, two hands. So, the paper is just got more and more complex, or what you would call more and more ‘free’ to try to explore that. We were blessed. I mean, you know, the school kid, I mean, every day, I was given really amazing young men and women to abuse, or I should say, corrupt. But they arrived with really solid skills already. By the time they were juniors, you guys, I'd had to do so little - so little remediation on paragraphs and thesis and the rest. So, we just got to get into it. But ultimately, the progress was if I felt that the students were arguing things that they found important, then I knew that learning was happening. So that was the ultimate way I would look for progress. For example, I had one kid funny, bright, young man, stubborn as a three-legged mule, and we hit the depression and, the Great Depression, and we had just read Grapes of Wrath, and he says, “fine, great. One sided; doesn't tell the whole story that depression.” and I said, “Okay, go after it. You're excused from the next book.” I've literally excused him from a book. And I said that we're going to map out what you think is the better argument. Well, I got a 14-page paper from him explaining that the Great Depression was God's punishing America for allowing homosexuality to exist. And of course I do what I always do I start laughing. I said, “This is amazing. This is a bizarre thesis in the world!” It was an incredibly complicated argument. And I said, “Okay, I'm going to give you an A for your argument, and I have to give you an A, because you did clearly research people who would say that there is no such thing as divine judgment of a culture, especially if homosexuality. But I'm going to tell you, and you already know that this won't be accepted as valid research, it is all personal interpretation.” And he said, “I understand that.” I said, “Good. Now, I want to ask you this. Have you showed your parents?” And they got real quiet. He said, “No.” “Okay. I will accept this paper, and I will give you the A, but I need the conclusion to change. You need to be able to tell me, in writing, why this would be hard to share. Parents.. anybody. What is the ridicule that you might be worried about? What is the loss of friendship you worry about, you need to put into the conclusion that even though you've discovered how powerful your faith is, you're afraid to make it public.” Well, that conclusion was the most important piece, the most important piece of all. So again, progress is determined on how complex your argument is. I've never liked simple, I don't believe in simple.

Kiera 42:13
And this isn't a question that's in my notes on the right, but I feel like lots of teachers attempt to make the classroom apolitical, but I don't believe the classroom is apolitical…

Layton 42:36
That's easy. Political is a concept of, what is the answer we're fighting about? That's what politics is devolved to, sadly. Do we believe we need this much money or that much money? Do we need this law or that law? The way that I would teach this is, okay, we can argue solutions and your... big deal. Whoever has the most votes is going to win. We already know that. That's the system. Let's argue about the problem. And is the problem actually that critical? Is the problem, something that's maybe just regional? Let's look at the problem and see if we can agree that it actually *is* a problem. I did the best I could to get students to not, like, what was the I mean, there are some things there is no solution, like the abortion debate. You can't have half an abortion. It's either yes or no. Pro-life, pro-choice. You know, they keep trying to shift the line, eight weeks to 13 weeks to none, to with approval. I mean, they fight over this line, but the truth is, it's yes or no. And I said okay, the tragedy is the abortion is the solution. What was the problem? Lack of birth control? Lack of knowledge? Lack of cultural conversation around sexuality? What was the problem, and what created the problem? And it got very interesting for the students, for example, who were very pro-life they would they got very uncomfortable when the idea is that of a young woman had been attacked and raped. There was nothing there that she had done wrong, *nothing*. Nothing and I said, but the problem still exists. She's pregnant. So, we have to figure out what is that problem. Are you going to ask the parents to adopt? You could put it out for adoption? What is the problem? She's not going to receive any support from the government... I mean, yes, but most don't. So, it's very spellbinding to get people to recognize the complexity of the problem. Because in simple solutions, they realize that they're just not going to work, they don't fit. So that's the key thing. Apolitical is when you argue about solutions. Learning happens when you argue about the problem.

Kiera 45:39
What a great quote. Okay, thank you. And then what would you say are the key differences for you between a ‘good’ teaching day and a ‘bad’ teaching day? And what are the most rewarding things you find about teaching?

Layton 45:59
Well, there are lots of things that can make a good and a bad teaching day, one of which is, if I had a sense from my fatigue, or my distraction, that I just taught the class. At the end of the day, I realized, yeah, I gave a lot of lectures, I could not tell you who was paying attention, who wasn't because I wasn't. And so, I also knew, if I started teaching the class, and just didn't have the energy to recognize the uniqueness of every kid, it was time to retire. And for me, I would have stayed if I could have had a nap every day. I just got tired. The other thing that could make it a bad day, is if in some way the student … it's fascinating to see when individual students or just any individual becomes defensive. There were days when the conversation just went wrong, or there were things in the schoolhouse that impacted the ability to have discussions. And defensiveness is usually generated because of feeling vulnerable or disrespected. And so, you get defensive. And if, in the way I was running a conversation, or somebody thought I was being disrespectful to anything, it could be a person, race, religion, whatever. If there was a sense that that had been implied, very appropriately, somebody would usually say, “What do you mean? What do you mean? Because that doesn't sound right. I don't like how that sounds.” And we would look at it together. And if I had phrased it poorly, I owned it. I said, “Good call. I gotta clean that up.” And we moved on. But if the defensiveness took or got energy in its own I.. there were days I had an entire class be upset. And I, we just would have to finally recognize this isn't
working and let's just back off for a minute. And we will give it another shot tomorrow because I need to reflect on what happened. And that didn't happen very often, more often something there'd been a great argument occurring like at lunch or something and students would come in mad something that happened in another class. And you just had to give up and go with the direction students took it. There were sometimes I thought the discussion was going to be great, I was so excited with my questions. And the kids say, “I don't get it, that's stupid.” and I go, “you just you just stabbed me through the heart. Let's try another one!” So, you just, you know, if you're going to teach, you have to expect a lot of what you're going to try to do is not going to connect. And you can drop it and come back with a different approach... and won't do any good to try to pound it down their throat - just won't do any good. So, and then there were days my fatigue got in the way. That's for sure.

Kiera 51:35
Have you experienced burnout as a teacher? And what strategies did you use to mitigate that burnout? Or what kind of kept that energy or drive to continue teaching even on like, hardest of days?

Layton 52:12
That's a great question. Um, I think, well, let's look at this way. I believe you have friends. God, I love to tease you. And one of the great gifts of friends is that they know you. And they can tell when you're exhausted, they can tell when you're in a foul mood, they can tell. And they are part then of the support circle that you need. I used to give greeting lectures and to new teachers, and I gave some lectures at one of the universities over in Seattle, Seattle U, to people becoming principals. And I said that probably the most important thing that you don't realize is getting yourself connected to a peer group. As a teacher, you cannot look to the students to sustain you. That is a) you don't want the energy and b) it's inappropriate. You don't use the students as your support group in any way. They can get you jacked up in their success makes you go home just dancing on a head of a pin, you're so excited. Great. But when you're down, it's never with students. Remember, the Bainbridge Review always posted a picture of the new hires of that year. And there's usually 15 to 30 new teachers a year. I said that's your class, you need to connect with them. For that first year, every month, go out for a beer and say I lost my keys. You know, they'll understand the panic, though you'll need to develop friendships within the schoolhouse and the teachers who don't and only have their friendships outside of the school house, become very disconnected. They come in, they teach your class, and they leave. And they don't participate in things in the schoolhouse. You need to develop the circle of people who are teaching. It's essential. Okay.

Kiera 55:06
So, this is a question I created. I created this word *inspiragination*, which is just basically combining inspire and imagination together.

Layton 55:19
I figured that one out.

55:23
And so, before I give you my definition, I kind of wanted it to ask, just off the top of your head. I'm curious what that word would mean to you or what you think it could mean?

Layton 55:38
Well, going back to *Winesburg Ohio* I kept thinking. I kept trying to tell everybody that when we did our unit on existential crisis, the idea is that to inspire imagination speaks to the existential potential, not to the dark side is that you get to make it up every day. You get to redefine every day, that nature of the relationship that you have with people, you get to look at others, you get to you watch a movie, and you just saw a conversation that just shocked you, it was so powerful and wonderful, and you let it then bleed itself into the rest of your life. The concept or inspire is easy. It's the ideas that I have to let not only my own imagination, but other people's imaginations, inspire me, which is what teaching is. You know, that's, that's basically what we're doing. At least the way I like it is that I'm always imagining, well, what did the author mean by this, you know, I'm always having to make it up – you know, remember 'we're flying solo in the dark?' I'm making it up as I go. Not as an excuse. But as literally as using your word and inspire imagination. I am making the relationship up every day, to my work, to the planet, to my friends, my wife, my amazing grandkids… If you ever want to watch inspire imagination, well my grandkids were over yesterday, and Fisher's the oldest, and he came running in and hollers, “Grandpa stop!” And I freeze, I said “What?!” I mean, he literally is just inside the door, and said “right behind you… there is a dragon. You got to come and stand behind me. I will protect you.” Okay? He's feeling incredibly inspired. *He's* going to protect *me*. I love it. He's five years old. So, I ran right behind him. And I said, “What do we need for weapons?” Okay, then we got into the imagining. But I just like the idea, it's a complete gift of reimagining everything, every relationship you have. It's like, how often have I told my wife that I love her? Every day forever. You have you seize the moment. Right now, you take her by surprise. Okay, there's a flower which you didn't expect a flower, whatever it is. But it's it can be exhausting. It can be unsettling, because you would like to have more stability than that. But I don't think there is such a thing as stable. I'm not stable, as you well know. I'm getting old. So, what's your definition?

Kiera 59:01
My definition is “moments or experiences in which one is inspired to imagine.” I had a professor that kind of just made things click and made me relate what I'm learning to the world and etcetera.

Layton 59:24
Every relationship is up for redefinition. It’s amazingly powerful.

Kiera 59:31
It’s like, I didn't know what - I just I didn't know what it was. I'm like, “What is he doing? Like, what is he doing?” I'm like, “I want to do that!” So, I just figured I would try to create a word that could - I don't know if there is a word that capture that, but that was the closest thing.

Layton 59:56
You keep thinking up words. Yeah, I always used it as it was the greatest act of celebration, is that every time we rethought something, we reaffirm something, we needed to let something go because it was now dated, it was not who I am anymore or whatever … that we have to celebrate
our, our capacity to change. And if you have a professor who's constantly challenging you to look at what you are in the world, and it just because every time you do that, you change it, you change the relationship, you change the relation. But you got to celebrate it. You can't get overwhelmed with it. That's the great risk. Because the existential potential can become the existential crisis where it's too much. You don't know what you're supposed to do. Should I say yes or no? I got two hands, but I still have to decide, I don't know what to do! And the answer is, “yes.” You don't know what to do. And you will have to decide.

Kiera 1:01:18
Okay, well, my last second to last thing is just if there was anything that you were kind of coming into this conversation with that you felt like you didn't get a chance to say. I just want to put that space out there. If you were like, Oh, I wanted to say this, though, there wasn't a question that addressed it.

Layton 1:01:43
I think that the only piece of the puzzle that we didn't talk about, is has the student changed, you know, has the world - especially now, when you look at the cultural divide, everybody's convinced the red and blue disaster that is established, even through the last election, is evidence of a cancer. And I chuckled, I said, well, it kind of pales compared to the Civil War. And you didn't see anything if you didn't go through the 60s. I mean, that's when you had what we call the generation gap. I had a bumper sticker that said, “trust no one over 30.” I mean, it was just - the other one also said, “Eat the Rich.” I mean, there was just this monstrous cultural divide. And there was violence. I mean, we had cities burning, we had racial riots, we had the anti-Vietnam War protests. But has all of that changed the 16-year-old that sits in front of me? And that's again, I think, where at some point, every teacher has to separate out what they were at 16 from what their 16-year-old that's in front of them. I mean, Vietnam was an ancient history for you guys, but the Vietnam protests… that was my world at 19. Somebody used to say, “well, have the students changed?” And I chuckled, said, “not much, but the mothers have changed a lot.” And I think the greatest impact of change in our culture is another 100 years coming. And that is, we don't know how different we're going to be when women become full partners in everything. It’s going to change everything, in ways that I don't even know how to comprehend. I have young men who are just perfectly content - brilliant young man, said “B's good enough. B's fine.” And I have women stressing like mad because they got an A-. That's a significant shift in the student in front of me where young women are so connected to a future that they don't live in yet that one of my favorite writers, Susan Sontag, said “tragically, we teach our children to suffer future pain.” They're stressed out and they're hurt by things that have not happened yet, and they may never happen. We teach our children to suffer future pain. So, we have to look at what pain have you been taught as a young woman. What pain have you been taught as a young, Black man? Yeah, we need to constantly - are the students different? Every generation? Are they truly different?

Kiera 1:05:21
Okay, well, that was all of the major questions. The last sillier question is what's your favorite fun book? And then one is going to be a book that more like heavily influenced you. But I know that's, there's so many books.
Those are great questions. And I'm always asked for titles and a lot of times I, I use my literature as a bit of an escape. I really love a lot of mysteries. And I love a lot of science fiction, good. science fiction is amazing. But a lot of people are finding both those a little bit lightweight. But I think it's a question to me ultimately, in literature in particular. I've never bought the idea that there's a thing called the classics. But there are books that were written long ago that are so damn good. Hey, they are so still good. As I said, Mockingbird will forever be an amazing novel. Look at the young, two young girl coming of age without a mother. I mean, it doesn't get better. I mean, it is so good. And I love the writing of a Fitzgerald just because I always wanted to write at least one sentence as well as he did. And I, I survived my adolescence by discovering Kurt Vonnegut, who used to just simply say, so it goes. There are some things out there that are way beyond your control. And it's much nicer to look at it and smile. It's beyond your control. You remember in what we read Slaughterhouse Five, but there is other ones too. Cat's Cradle and Monkey House Gang. I've gotten into enjoying historical fictions, Wolf Hall, my wife loves English. History. I tend to find the English very boring. At least their food is the worst food in the world. But yeah, so I'm not in a position to give you some great titles with apologies. My favorite will always be those Winesburg Ohio. Because just nobody reads it anymore. And I love Zora Hurston and her books, you know, she was again, the 1940s and the rest. Yeah, there's good stuff, you'll find them.

Thank you. I've got like four pages of notes right now. And this is just awesome. If there's anything that you would like me to omit from the interview. I can do so. Like if you said anything and you're like, “Oh, I actually don't want that, that was too personal…”

I'm too old to be vein, and I trust you.

Okay - and I also am going to say that this interview is going to be transcribed and the audio and audio-visual will be deleted immediately after the transcription is created. And the research collected for the study will not be used for any purpose besides the senior thesis.

Recording Ends.
Kiera 0:09
So, I have some preliminary questions. Would you like me to use a pseudonym for your name?

Cone 0:16
No, you don't have to do that.

Kiera 0:28
Okay. And then, if you're comfortable sharing, what is your gender identity, pronouns, race, ethnicity, and whether you identify as a young-adult, middle-aged adult, or senior?

Cone 0:47
So, I identify as male. I would say that I'm white. I'm 49. I consider myself to be middle-aged.

Kiera 1:04
And then I just have some background teaching questions before we get into like the main ones. So, what is your educational background? Where did you get your B.A.? And where did you get your teaching credential(s)?

Cone 1:20
Yeah, so I got my undergraduate degree at UCLA. I studied political science, and I graduated in 1993. And then I got my Master's in Curriculum and Instruction from University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1999. And then I did a year's teaching certification program at a school called Dominican college, and I got that in 2000.

Kiera 1:45
Okay, cool. And then what subjects, or subject, do you teach in high school? And how long have you been teaching at the high school level?

Cone 1:52
Yeah, so I teach social studies. This, I started in 2001, so this would be my 20th year. I think that's right. I don't know. And, and I've taught social studies the whole time, and I really enjoy teaching social studies.

Kiera 2:10
Okay, and then the last question of the section is what inspired you to be a teacher? Did you have any mentors that heavily influenced that journey to education?

Cone 2:22
Yeah, so I, you know, my parents were both in education. My mom was a teacher, my dad was a teacher for a little while, then a principal and superintendent. So, I actually didn't want to do that. That was pretty boring. Like you know, every night they would talk about the same stuff. So I wasn't sure what I wanted to do and to make a really long story short, I went to Wisconsin, and I was going to get a master's in journalism. And I thought I wanted to be a journalist. And that came from when I was about 25, I took an 11-month trip around the world. And I met so few people from the U.S., and I was very angry. Like, how can a country with such influence not produce people who are more curious about the world? And so, I did a lot of reading. And I
would say for me, somebody who was a huge influence on me was a professor named Edward Said. And his work really was very influential to me in terms of thinking about how do we talk about other people in other parts of the world, and when/why do we always tend to do it in ways that flatter ourselves, maybe distort reality? So then, I went to Wisconsin, I realized in two weeks, I'd screwed up. I was like, I don't want to do this. I went to my advisor, I said, “What do I do?” And she said, “you know, you might, you might think about teaching, because in teaching, you can tell stories about the rest of the world too.” So, I went, and I audited a class by a woman named Gloria Ladson-Billings. She's like a real big superstar in education, but I didn't know any of that at the time. And I loved her class, and then it seemed like, you know, this might be an interesting pathway. So, it was not super linear, in my case.

Kiera 3:54
That’s so awesome, because we just did a reading of hers in my sociology of education class. So, when you sent that I was like, “Oh, Ladson-Billings. How did you get her? So cool!”

Cone 4:06
Well, it's funny, I'll just say one quick thing. She knew me when I was 24 or 25, and I was pretty lost. I really didn't know what I wanted to do. And so, I always hold on to that notion of as a teacher, you sometimes have to see things in students that they don't see in themselves, right. Like you have to be able to see a potential so that I hopefully that's like, kind of a force that humbles you as a teacher to think like, “Well, shit, somebody did that for me once. You know, why can't I do it for others?”

Kiera 4:34
Right? Totally. Okay, thank you. Yeah. It's funny, like, even if I'm feeling low energy – before we even started this interview, I was just like, I know after this interview, I'm just gonna like to reignite that energy, like, shoot, like, I'm so excited. You know what I mean? Like, it's so awesome. Anyways, okay… do you try to inspire critical thinking or critical consciousness raising within your students, and how? Or along those lines like, what would you say your current teaching style or pedagogy consists of?

Cone 5:20
Okay, I love that question. And I'll tell you why. Because to me every teacher thinks they do this, every single one of us. And so, sometimes I think that the people who are the most eloquent at this are just kind of BS-ers. And that really, what you need to do is you need to come into people's classrooms, not just for one day, come for a week and hang out and see what you think. I think the proof is in the pudding. I, you know, I think for me, I have this sense that students in the United States have a very particular worldview. And oftentimes, that we're exceptional, and we've always been a force for good, and that it's always kind of been one way. And I don't see the world that way. Right? I think it's just more interesting and more complex. And so, what I try to do is get them into different ways of seeing it. And it's not always from one perspective, like I have libertarian economists come and hang out with us too right? But my sense is like, it's just so much more interesting when you're able to grapple with how complex this is. I was just thinking about this. We had a faculty meeting earlier this year where a student said, they were talking about sort of how we teach about Black history. And they said, you know, we know Dr. King marched. And I thought it was funny, right? Because I like that they were kind of slapping us on
the hand saying, like, you keep telling us the same story. But at this point in my life, what I also thought is, oh, you don't know the half of it. You don't know what a fascinating character Dr. King was. How much more radical he was, then we've led you to believe. How flawed he was as a human being in the same way that we all are. So last week, or maybe two weeks ago, I showed this film called MLK FBI, and it really talks about how the FBI went beyond wiretapping, they were actually following him. You know they wrote him a letter and most people think it was director Hoover that said, like, you know, in essence, you should kill yourself. Right? And like, my students, they complain, you guys, you know, teach about MLK all the time. And I was like, shit, we haven't given you the good stuff. We haven't given you the speech at Riverside about Vietnam. We haven't given you his complicated relationship with the FBI. We haven't let you know that he's a serial philanderer. He plagiarized his thesis, like, I think he's a great American ever lived. But fuck, he's really flawed too… and so, I like as a teacher being able to make people feel like, “Oh, this thing that I thought I knew, I'm actually pretty sure I didn't know it well, and therefore I want to know more about it.”

Kiera 7:48
Mm hmm. And how would you say you instigate that like, just teaching things? What is the ‘meat’ of that practice, if that makes sense?

Cone 8:02
Yeah, yeah. So, this won't be super coherent. So, I don't know how you'll write this up. But here are a few things that jumped out to me. So one is, I love to ask students on like, the first day of a unit, like take out your phone and videotape yourself. And I'm going to ask you this question. And you answer. And basically, what's it's really fun is like, you kind of nail down, Okay, what do you know, at this point in time, and then it's so tangible when you come back a month later, say like, “Oh, wow.” So, I might ask them, like, you know, um, you know, what do you think about reparations for African Americans? Cool. Or I asked them this year, we were studying the civil rights era, we were studying sort of a post-civil war to the Civil Rights Movement. So, 1865 to 1965, I said, “you have one minute, tell me everything you know about the history of race and racism, 1865-1960s.” So, everyone tapes themselves right, and then they have to send me the video. And then they have to transcribe it. So anyhow, it's super fascinating. So, we had 50 something kids, and so I said to them, “Hey, y'all, I want to push back a little bit. Okay. So, like, I would think that if you asked me, ‘What would I talk about?’ I said, the number one word I would use would be terror.” This is the era of terror for Black people, like Black people are terrorized. I said, “Now let's go through and we can just do Ctrl F and go through the whole document.” Terror appeared twice. Okay. I said, the second thing I talked about is migration. This is an era in which Black people as soon as they can leave the South, they leave the South. Literally not one student did it. I said, “but let me tell you some of the stuff I did see.” I said, “I saw water fountains seven times. Why are we talking about - I mean, water fountains are a piece of this, but they're a very small piece.” So, then we had this fascinating discussion about like, you know, why are we doing this? And then I said, “Okay, you guys go, you look up words, and you see what you're finding here.” Right? We had some really interesting discussion about like, why is it that we like to think about ourselves in these ways? So, for instance, a lot of kids talked about slavery. And I was like, “slavery is done.” But it's in a way, it's like slavery is so awful, that when they look back at it, they imagine I would have been on the right side of that issue. I wish I wouldn't have bought cotton, I wouldn't have bought sugar, I would have protested… but terror
that's a lot more complex, because I think we can all acknowledge that we might be living in an era of terror and not do much because it's amorphous, and it makes us feel uncomfortable. And then after that, the things that I taught were very much in the direction of showing that this was an era of terror. Right, so we looked at, you know, Wilmington, and Elaine, and Tulsa... We looked at the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, which most kids know about, right, you know, the four little girls who were killed. But um, yeah, earlier this week, we talked - there were actually five girls in the bathroom, and four of them died and one lived, and the one who lived, Sarah Collins, is the sister of Addie Mae Collins, one of the girls who died. So, we talked to Sarah Collins, right, and that happened 58 years ago. And so, you know, when you're able to personalize it, when you're gonna say, like, let's talk to this person who lived in a city that was terrorized. I mean, that's pretty powerful. We, you know, we did other things, too, we looked at, we looked at maps of migration, we heard oral histories of people whose ancestors had been lynched. We talked to a historian who told us about Dr. King being surveilled by the FBI. But basically, like I had a framework in my mind, I think that kids have a distorted sense of this period, that it's mainly about water faucets and not being able to vote. In reality, that's like 2%. the other 98% is so much more interesting. So, I kind of knew what they would say. I asked him, they said it. And then I said, let's go back to this. Right?

Kiera 12:03
Thank you. Yeah, yeah. Okay, awesome. So how much of 'you' do you display to your students? Or in other words, how much are you authentically yourself while teaching and interacting with them versus performing... Like wearing your “teaching hat,” or your “Cone” hat?

Cone 12:25
That's a really good question. Um, at the beginning of my career, it was almost all performance - None me. As I've gotten older, I think it's probably, I don't know, maybe 70-30, me versus performance. I mean, I'll say to them, “you know, you guys, like when I go home? I'm not Mr. Cone, right, you know, I, like, I watch crappy shows on Netflix, too. It's not always, you know, economics and genocide and all that stuff.” But, um, but I will say this is an important caveat. I'm a white man. And I think I get way more latitude than people who are not white men. So, you know, if I'm like, “Oh, I'm much more myself than I used to be,” you should know that a woman doesn't normally have that privilege. A Black person almost never has that privilege, unless it's kind of an almost all Black school. And a younger person wouldn't either. So, I hope with that privilege, I'm making some choices that other folks would like to make if they had that, that privilege, that autonomy. But oh, yeah, it's not even close. And I see. I mean, I'm in a very liberal area, but I gotta tell you, I see the way Black people are treated. I see the way women and young people are treated, they don't get, they don't get nearly the grace that I get.

Kiera 13:44
Mmhmm. And are you open with your students about that privilege? And the fact that a classroom is not apolitical... the fact that the classroom is a political space? Or how do you approach that?

Cone 14:05
Yeah, I think earlier, my career has sort of been more didactic and direct, you know, like, you know, you can't be neutral on a moving train and, the Howard Zinn line, right, like, and now I
think, to me, I'm less and less impressed by the things that I would consider signifying, and more impressed with just doing the work. So, like, in my class, we'll read like very radical texts, like we're reading this book on reparations, and like, gonna tell you, none of my white kids have really thought about reparations, right? But I'm not gonna go up there and say, like, well, it comes from this particular intellectual tradition, and “Oh, I'm so woke because I'm reading this.” I don't do that. Right? I just think that like, especially if you teach about race and you’re white, you just need to acknowledge right like that, like, you know, because I have a friend who comes in and he's Black, and so oftentimes, they'll say, like, you know, Coach A______, he's had a different experience and we'll talk about that in class, but mainly I just kind of do the work. And I think it speaks for itself. I'll tell you this, for the last five years before this, I had my students in this class do research projects in which they researched a case in which an African American citizen was killed by a police officer. Now, you probably get, that's a very radical project, in some ways. That saying, these aren't isolated, this is systemic, right? The fact that we can do an entire unit and every year, we can just come up with new cases, if we want to, it's systemic. But see, I think if I was younger, I might have taken more pride from like, standing up there in front of the audience, because they present it to people and say, “This is systemic and blah, blah, blah” instead of actually just kind of getting out of the way and letting the kids speak that letting the audience kind of discover it, that it's not always about me and my having to show everybody I get kind of exhausted by that sometimes some colleagues.

Kiera 16:03
I can kind of weave into another question, which is, what role does discipline play, like in your teaching style? Or how do you engage with the assumed power and real power that you hold as an authority figure in that space?

Cone 16:21
Yeah, you know, um, so I would say, like, if you were to come to my class, I think that there are a couple things that might seem, like, contradictory, but I think they coexist. Like, I think the students and I, we do joke around a lot. And they'll push back because we go on field trips, and we get to know each other, and so like, they'll kind of clown on me, and, and I think there's something that's kind of jocular there. But like, I'll be really honest, like, I think my classes really, there's a heavy teacher-print on it, right? Like, if you come to class, like, I don't give a lot of homework, but if you come to class, and haven't done the work, like, I'm not happy. Like, I'm not gonna just like say, it's cool, because it's not cool. Because we're all ready to have a discussion and you didn't do your work. And like, when we're reading a book, like, I'm gonna get super pissed if I see the phone out because we're reading this important text. But what I think happens, like you kind of get that stuff out of the way, the first week. And then you're able to do all the work, I think, that you hope to do as an educator, right? I was just talking with a buddy. And we were laughing about all the mistakes we made early in our career. And it's like, it's, I will try never to discuss grades in class. I hate it. I think the weakest teachers discuss grades in class, and then kind of negotiate with kids all the time. I think the best teachers, it's 99% of the time, it's about learning. It's about the stuff. It's about the discussion and the exploration. So yeah, in my class, like, I don't think kids would feel comfortable, like not doing their stuff. But I hope that if I am having a heavier teacher footprint, it's in service of something that really matters. Last comment on this, you know, like, there's this educational theorist, and he's dead Paulo Freire from Brazil, right. And so, people always cite for free, right, but I had a professor
Once who was really close to them, and they said, you know, Freire didn't want you just to discuss like it, like it was supposed to be a meaningful discussion that could lead to transformation. It wasn't just about popping off and grabbing any thought out of the air. And I think that sometimes, when people call like a class or a student-centered, they what they really mean is like, we just get to talk about anything under the sun. And I don't know, man, I think stakes are too high. Life is too short, like we have 180 days. Most of those days, let's be really purposeful about what we're doing.

Kiera 18:42
Yeah, Freire is very influential in this project. Okay, do you connect lessons to the real world (even though the classroom is a part of the real world) and student experiences? How do you manage that?

Cone 19:09
Well, you know, sometimes it's easier than others, right? I don't want to lie and make you think like, every time it's easy, I find it particularly hard in the classes that are mandatory. So, like a world history class, and civics... I feel like I can do it, but it's like, sometimes it's a little awkward, like, 'here's the transition’ … I find it a lot easier in my electives. So, I think one way, one way that I do it, and that probably a lot of other teachers do it… So, if we're doing a unit, and it's a normal, year so, not a pandemic, and we're together, and we're studying Yemen. So, for like three or four weeks, we'll teach about Yemen and like, it'll be cool, like, we'll watch documentaries, and we'll talk to filmmakers. And we'll Skype with a journalist and all this and so we'll know a lot of Yemen's history, right? And sometimes I'll give an assessment in there like you really need to know was partitioned in The British were there and it doesn't have any resources, but from the time of Muhammad… Then at the end of that, I say, Okay, what do you want to know? Usually, people are in groups, and we have a class of 30. Maybe there's like 10-12 groups, and you'll say, I want to know, blah, blah, blah. And I'll say, like, “Ehh, it doesn't sound so interesting. But tell me.” And then you'll tell me, and then I'll be like, “Okay, I get it, I get why you care about that.” Or you'll say, like, “I was just giving you a topic, because I knew I had to have a topic.” And I was like, “Well, what do you really care about?” And then that's for me, where that that idea of it being relevant. So, like, when we did Yemen, I had one group, and they wanted to know, like, well, their parents dying, and kids are getting orphaned, what happens to the orphans? And of course, one of the kids had been adopted from an orphanage in China. So, like, that issue is super relevant to them, right? I had a kid who had transitioned and wanted to know about LGBTQ culture in Yemen, which, by the way, like, you can fucking get killed for, right? So it's like very underground, but somehow, this student had found like, some kind of underground activist and arranged to talk to the activist. And so, again, I think it's like, if you set up the issue, and it's interesting, then kids will find all kinds of ways to make it relevant to themselves, and then you can get out of the way. And then what I really love is, so they do that research. And then oftentimes, we'll bring in, like, sometimes just parents, but sometimes it's the whole community, and we'll have them, they'll stand up there with their poster board, and, you know, it's kind of like, you know, if you go to a conference, right, and it's a bunch of grad students. But honestly, I think students love it. Because it feels like it mattered, right? And because they know more than adults, and because adults will ask them questions, and they'll say, you know, I love it. It's like, you'll hear him say, like, “Well, actually, it's not quite that simple.”
Right? You know, that's so kick ass for a 16-year-old to be able to tell like the principal that right? So, yeah, it's awesome.

Kiera 22:21
Okay, cool. And then, how do you assess student progress in your classroom?

Cone 22:29
Yeah, you know, I'm probably not so good at that, if I'm going to be really honest. I'll say like, I don't track data a whole lot. I don't always do like really clear benchmarks and things like that. I guess the way that I look at it is, you know, there's like all this research out there that says, like, students are going to forget 80 to 90%, of what they learned in your class within a short span of time. So, for me, I try to pick issues that I think will be interesting to kids. And by that oftentimes, I mean, it's stuff they've either never heard about, or they only know very superficially, I try not to go into there something that I would never teach, like about abortion, like everybody already has their mind made up. It's not interesting anymore. Right? And so, then I have faith, that, like, if we're doing interesting work in class, I can take just about any kid, like, just about any kid could come and take this class and be successful. Now, if you're really high achieving and I'm low achieving, right, you know, or however you want to frame it, it will look different, right? It really will, it won't look the same. But we can still both be successful. And I'll tell you another thing that I just kind of signed off on like, I just don't invest a lot of time in grades. The grades in my class tend to be very high, like, ridiculously high. But I think most students would say like, it's a rigorous class. And what they mean is, it's rigorous in terms of the work we're doing, it's not rigorous because I'm giving a lot of homework or there's 20-page essays… not at all. It's rigorous because we're doing work that's meaningful, because like, you know, if you're going to get up and present to an audience about, you know, whatever, I'll use Yemen again, like, you got to know your stuff, right? And we practice in class, we meet with a lot of experts, and we take our time practicing. So, like, that's actually another kind of interesting example. I tell the students like, here's what I think a good question is and does. And so, we kind of have a formula, and every student can ask a good question. But some questions will be sort of more basic than others, but everybody can ask. That, to me, is the democratic spirit of a classroom. Like, I didn't want to be the teacher that's like, “I know everything. And so, let me just get you to know this stuff that I know,” like Freire talks about the banking model, right? I wanted to be somebody who said, like, “here's some interesting stuff, and you got to know this before you can become a part of the conversation. But once you know, there's like, you figure out what you want to know.”

Kiera 24:53
Yeah. And what is, if you don't mind sharing, that 'good question formula?' Like, I don't know what that is.

Cone 25:02
Yeah, yeah. Oh, well, no, we just made it up. So basically, I said, first thing is, you have to establish what you know, at the beginning and in a non-showy way. This is really important. Because if I say to you, like, you know, I don't know, I had a girl last year, she interviewed the mayor of Baton Rouge about a really famous case in which a police officer murdered a Black citizen. And in fact, that was kind of the case that got the mayor elected. If you say like, yeah,
and you know, I know, I know, there's been tension in in Baton Rouge about policing… that's one thing. But if you say, I know that in the two years before you were elected, there were 14 Black men who were killed by police officers… that's a whole 'nother thing. What that signals to the person is you did your work, so now I can give you the good stuff. I don't have to like condescend, and say, ‘great question’ if it's not. So the first thing is establish what you know, in a non show away. Second thing is, ask about something that you genuinely care about. They don't know you. So oftentimes, if you're gonna ask a question, you tell them why it matters to you. You say, “Hey, I had an uncle, who was in the military. And he said, one of the things that shocked him when he came back to the US was blah, blah, blah.” So, we really coach them on how to do that. And then to me, the third element is, I say, it can't be answered with a quick Google search, like, you know, come on, like, you know, you're asking for their opinion, you're asking something you couldn't figure out on your own. And so, you know, we meet with, like, really fancy people and sometimes we go on field trips, and the kids are like, you know, pretty nervous, right? But I have to tell you, that's something pretty empowering. Like, if you were to go to the World Bank, we used to go to the World Bank, and we meet with a guy who's the president, in this, like, 13th floor office, like, I always make sure every kid could ask a question. So, it could be a kid who's like getting C's in every class is there only honors class… that kid was ready to ask a question. And to me, that's so important, because that gets to, how do you think about yourself? Right? Do you think that you're the sort of person who like…you're capable of thinking an interesting thought you're capable of asking shit to the President of the World Bank? And I would like track it, when you're on the field trip, every kid has to ask at least one question every day. We can't have Johnny over there not asking a question, because he slowly starts to feel like a piece of shit. Like, “I'm just hanging out, and I'm not really a part of this.” So, if you were with us, and weren't going to these meetings, walking down the street, we look maniacal. Like, we have kids in pairs and they're practicing their questions, and they're giving feedback. And a lot of times I'm purposeful, I get a really like cool senior to like, mentor somebody. But then I'll be like, “Okay, everybody change, go fist to fist!” And then you know, they go fist a fist and go, “I don't like these groups go fist to fist!” And we're trying to build camaraderie. And we're trying to build a sense, like, we all succeed when any of us succeeds. And so, um, yeah, sometimes in the big fancy meetings I'll call on like, some kids are gonna crush it for the first two or three, right? Just so we're good. But it will never be the case that it's just one kind of kid asking questions.

Kiera 28:15
Okay. And how do you actually get all these amazing speakers and people to say, like, “yeah, I will come” like, how do you do that?

Cone 28:26
Just, um, you know, it's like a combination. First of all, reaching out a lot of times, just getting a lot of ‘No’s.’ at the very beginning, I would say every summer, I would send out like, 100 letters. It was crazy, that like, all these letters for my students and these were like, thick things. And I was like, I can't do this, this is exhausting, but reach out to a lot of people. And basically, the higher up they are, the more famous they are, the more likely they say no, but the less famous, like, every professor pretty much says, yeah, almost every journalist says, yeah. And the truth is, it's not always about big names. But the big names are cool, too, because then it makes the kids like puff out their chest and, and some of the big names I would say, it's like, if we meet with
somebody, and they like us, they usually meet with us again, and then sometimes went in my letter to you, if you're a big shot, it's like, “oh, we talked with so and so and so and so and so.” So it's kind of like, you know, maybe in their mind, it's like somebody has already vouched for us, right?

Kiera 29:36
Okay. Yeah, I'm just like, that’s incredible. Okay, so what are the key differences to you between a good day teaching and a bad day teaching? What are the most rewarding things about teaching for you?

Cone 29:56
Okay, I'll answer the last question, first. The most rewarding stuff is when you feel like students are really thinking, like, they send you an email and say, “Man, I don't understand what yesterday’s speaker meant in that analogy about the pie.” You know? That's a great feeling when you come to class and people are excited, or you throw out a question to people, and instantly they jump into it, and they're not watching you to see if you're monitoring them. Like, that's, that's great. Okay, so then what's the difference between a good day and a bad day? There's a lot of past to a bad day. Yeah, I mean, you know, so like, here's the thing is like, you could be the best teacher in the world, you could be, okay? And then you have 30 kids, and two of them could just hate you, because you have their boyfriend or girlfriend, and they got a B, and they didn't get into UNC, and, you know. So, and you'd be surprised you, would look at a teacher, you think, oh, he or she's awesome. You know, they've been doing this for 10 years, they've got it. No, every year starts anew. And it's easier to get by as you go along. But I had a girl four years ago, and she was such an asshole to me, she really was because her boyfriend done poorly in my class. And she just took out after me, and I gotta say, it got to the point, I kind of dreaded sitting in that class because of that one kid. And I had to kind of train my eyes not to look at her. Or I would be like, I'm not taking any questions on this assignment till you've talked to a partner for three minutes, because of that kid. And so, there are a lot of things that can bring you down. People have a very simplistic idea about teaching. It can bring you down, if you don't like your principal, it can bring you down, if you have that one kid, it can bring you down if you feel like you know, people, they come to your class with 10 seconds left, they don't really want to come. It can bring you down if you feel like you got these kids who are just always trying to go to the bathroom, then they're not buying into what you're selling. Yeah, so what can be a good day? A good day, probably in some ways, it's just the absence of some of those things, right? And then, um, for me, like, I'm happy, like, when we're reading books, I love reading books with students. And I love having conversations with other people. And I love it when they're doing their own research that they care about. But I would really distinguish that between like sometimes, like in world history, I used to like, “you look up this about the Ottoman Empire!” and nobody cared. They did it, but they didn't care. That's not a good day. Right? Yeah.

Kiera 32:26
And then kind of related, have you experienced burnout as a teacher? And do you have strategies to mitigate that burnout? And like, just like that feeling of like, “oh, this is why I'm doing this!” Like, how do you re-energize that passion?

Cone 32:50
It’s harder when you're young, right? Because I think again, I think there's these simplistic notions, like young teachers are idealistic, and older teachers are burned out. And that's true a lot of the time, right. But I'll tell you this, when you're young, as a teacher, you're just not that good. You're not there, you will never really be a great first year teacher, you might be beloved, you might be charismatic, you might be fun, but that person who’s a great first year teacher, look at and five years later, they're able to do so many more things, right? So I think it's so hard to be a young teacher, because there's like this gap between what you're actually doing and then what you want to be doing. That was really hard for me at the beginning. Um, down the road, there are other things that will kind of burn you out. So, I'll talk just very personally, I've been burned out at times by affluent white parents, who I think just hound you, and hound you out of such privilege. I remember once I got an email from a parent, this might not seem important to you, but it struck me. The kid’s parents said, “my kids got a B, what can they do to improve?” And I was like, are you fucking kidding me? We’re in the first week of the second quarter, we've had a five-point assignment and they got a four, and you're sending me an email about this? Like, I want to give an analogy, and I hope it doesn't sound too crude. It's a little crude, okay… I say sometimes, you know, it'd be like, if you were dating somebody, and you're like, “Oh, we have all these connections to each other, and it's awesome!” And then they're like, “Can we just have sex?” Like, they just want to go just to that base thing all the time. And sometimes with affluent white students, and affluent white parents, I feel like it's that about grades. Like you'd like to think you're stretching them, they like the book, and they liked the trip, but the second you give them a bad grade… let me talk about this. And you just feel like they're hitting you over the head. So that's hard. So, and by the way, I almost left my school about five years ago because I got into it with two or three students, I wouldn't change their grade. Right? And this was absurd. They literally, two of these students got admitted to a top 10 university in the country, their second semester seniors. And I said, I'm not going to change your grade, you didn't do this project, I'm not going to change it. So, they're going to get a B for the year. It came down that, the administration told me, they're going to be listed as valedictorians, which means that they didn't get a B in my class, because the threat of parental pressure and/or a lawsuit was so severe, that they couldn't really guarantee that my grade would stand up. That was hard, because I'm like, man, if I can't even control - I'm not a power freak - but if I can't even say to a white kid of affluence, who's going to an elite university, you didn't get an A, then why? So now I look back at that, I think, oh, rich, white people are always going to rich, white people. And I think I let it rent too much space in my head, that like, if the entire school district isn't going to fight them? Well, why? Why would I invest a lot of my time into it, right? So, what I do now is my grades are pretty high. Most people do the work. Most of the time I think the work is pretty engaging for all of us. And I no longer worry about the fact that like 80% of my students get an A. It just, I can't give it any thought on the other things that kind of burn me out… I hate meetings. There's just too many meetings. I feel like it's unfair to teachers, we should have more time to plan. But we just have so much time spent on meetings and grading. And then the other thing, if I'm being super honest, I feel like there are so many fake, woke people. And that's it takes a toll on you. So, like, I think actually, like my students, we've been doing this project about researching the killings of Black people at the hands of police for years. Right? Like, I wasn't aware of any other high school classes in the area doing it. And then the summer it became sorta everybody was kind of paying attention to Black Lives Matter, and there was like, you know, I felt like everybody vastly overcompensated, you know, my feeling would have been like, hey, if you haven't done any of this work, and you teach an AP class, literally, can you recruit one or two
more Black kids to your class, like, that's actually a tangible thing that could help somebody, right? But instead, it's like, let's get a list of podcasts and a list of books and a list of films and spent a lot of time compiling a big ass list, as far as I know, no student paid any attention to over the summer. But everybody there felt super cool about themselves. Right? And then it's like, right after the inauguration, we had a faculty meeting. And, you know, there's question because it's February, like, “so how are you like, you know, trying to do a better job this year with Black History Month?” And, like, everybody's like, I played the Amanda Gorman poem in class. And, you know, it's like, “Dude, it's not about that!” It's not about the supplemental one-time thing. It's, it's not about playing hip hop in your class. It's not about having a Black Lives Matter sticker on your car. Like, all that's cool, cool. But the really cool stuff is like, doing work, that stretches kids to think about these issues, doing work with a diverse group of kids, doing work to bring in different voices to your class. I just feel like sometimes people want it so cheap, and, that kind of burns me out, I can get kind of petty about that.

Kiera 38:21
Thank you. Okay, and then you kind of touched on this in the very beginning, but if you're comfortable sharing, how do your own identities influence your teaching in the classroom? If they do, or how do you enter the classroom with those identities?

Cone 38:45
Yeah, please ask me follow up questions if I'm not really answering. Okay. So, like, you know, I don't think that was at the front of my teaching, my thinking, when I became a teacher, right? So, um, I don't know if I am as explicitly thinking about that as other people might. But like, I am aware, again, as I said, like, you know, I'm a white man in a country that valorizes white men, right? So, like, I can get away, in my eyes, with a lot of shit. Like, you know, so this semester, just alone, we're reading a book about reparations. We're reading an incredibly raw memoir that like, I was kind of afraid I was gonna get in trouble for… I didn't ask for permission, I just did it, right? We're reading this book, The Nickel Boys, that's really, really great. We're talking with all these people. I'm not always kind of like yelling about like, you know, anti-Black racism. Although I tell people, that's what this class is about this year. Um, so when I kind of frame things for students, I'll try and say something like, “you guys are so much more thoughtful about this than I was when I was your age.” I'll tell them, “You know, when I graduated high school, I went to actually one of the true diverse high schools.” Most schools when we say they're diverse, we mean they're mainly Black. But I went to one that was really diverse. I graduated, I was like, “oh, man, we all got along.” And I could point to like one or two, like really close Black friends. Right? I went back to the reunion 10 years later, after I'd been ‘Glorialized’ in Ladson-Billings’ class, and I was like, I can't believe this. I can't - this is astonishing. I mean, I'm at this reunion, and there's probably 70 Black people, and I know, like six of them. And I left high school thinking we were this model, kind of utopian place, where everyone got along, and they look back at and I was like, no, I just patted myself on the back, because I knew like three black people in my honors or AP classes. So, I will tell them, stuff like that, you know, and we'll talk about stuff in our community. So, I think I tried to kind of at least tell them that, I mean, I'm a work in progress, too. And that as I get older, I get more aware of how little I actually know. And sort of more like, I'm more frustrated that I was satisfied with what I knew when I actually knew so little.
Kiera 41:24
So, I created this word called **inspiragination**, combining inspire and imagination. And I just was wondering, off the top of your head, no wrong answers, what you would say that means?

Cone 41:59
Yeah, I think it would mean something like, you help to create a space where people can get really excited. And that you're not sort of confined by a lot of previous iterations of schooling, or like “schooling has to be like this. You have to start with this, and you have to end with this.”
And that not only are you seeking to do that as a teacher, but you're seeking to model it for students so that they can do that, with respect to their own learning. That's what I think it means.

Kiera 42:34
I just said, “moments or experiences in which one is inspired to imagine” But I just thought of it because I had this professor my first year at San Diego State, and there just wasn't a word that I was like, that is what this guy did to me. I still don't know if that's the word, I don't know if there's a word for it. But I liked what you said about getting excited, because that's definitely how I felt.

Cone 43:07
And I do want to say something there, though, right? So, it's like, for you, that professor got you so geeked up, right? Now you want to read books or see films, and um, I think that's one of the true hallmarks when someone's learning: when they want to learn more. Like on their own outside of class… And so I, you know, you asked me earlier about sort of tracking student growth. And I'm not saying that's not important at all, I'm saying, I'm not very good at it. Right? And it's not at the top of my list. But I would think, like a nobler goal would be like, when that kid leaves your class, and it's not even, “do they keep pursuing Yemen?” But like, do they keep just thinking critically about the world? And do they keep seeking out that information? Right?

Kiera 43:48
Right. And then is there anything else that you came into this conversation with that you were thinking of that I didn't ask a question about? If not, it's totally fine, I just wanted to create that space, if there was anything that you feel like you wanted to say.

Cone 44:26
Yeah, so one thought is, like, you know, I think sometimes about, stories that we tell people, right? So, like stories that you might get told before you get married, about what marriage is going to be like, and, and I think that those kinds of frames are important, but I sometimes get frustrated, like I sometimes wish like people would tell young teachers or aspiring teachers, like, you know, it is a job, right? Like, you're not gonna love every day. And, um, you know that there's real value sometimes in being someone who can grind, like can do 180 lessons, like kind of anybody at certain point can do like, two good lessons. To do 180 I gotta say, it's a lot tougher than I realized at the beginning. Like, you'll have no clue how hard teaching is on your ego, especially at the beginning. Because you'll put hours into it, and the students won't like it. It's just they didn't like it. That's all that it was. But you will feel so rejected. And, to an extent, I could not have imagined that the beginning. So, I always kind of wish, you know, it's like, you want to give all these messages like, aim high, do creative stuff, like, don't just fucking have the kids on
butcher paper every Friday because it's easy for you, right? And at the same time, I want to say, but it's not all rainbows and ice cream cones. And along those lines, for me, I've gotten some of the most lovely feedback from former students in my career in like the last three or four years, and so I was like, you know what, I was working just as hard at the beginning, but I wasn't as good at it. I hadn't thought – I hadn't figured some stuff out. So, it's like, I don't want you to look at whoever you look at as being a great teacher and think like, well, if I'm not getting that in year three, I suck. No, no one gets that in year three. Right?

Kiera 46:14
Okay, cool. And then I'm just compiling a book list for fun at the end of my thesis. So, it could be the same book or if you have multiple, but I was gonna do like a fun book list and then a like book that heavily influenced you, as well. But if you have more than two or whatever, whatever you want to share.

Cone 46:39
That I would like teach in class, or just like purely for me?

Kiera 46:42
Just for you.

Cone 46:44
Okay, I think The Nickel Boys is a knockout. And if you read it, we'll talk about why. It's just it's such a gorgeous book. It's stunning. It's my favorite novel from like, the last five years. Um, I love Mountains Beyond Mountains, you know about Paul Farmer, right? That to me, had as big of an impact on my teaching is like kind of anything. You know, like you're like, inspiragation, Did I say that? Right? Okay. Because I felt in when I saw him, it's like, I don't mean to be grandiose, he's a million times cooler than anything any teacher will ever do. But I felt a kindred spirit. Like, I felt like, oh, here's somebody who sees this system, and realizes it's just not working for a lot of people. It doesn't have to be this limited. And yeah, that that book was just, it rocked my world like, yeah, that had an enormous impact on my thinking. And I'll tell you one other book that I really, like, that I read with my students a few times is, um, it's Jeremy Smith, Epic Measures. Do you know that book? I love it. It's really funky. I'm not going to give away much. But it's about actually a dude who's pretty close friends with Paul was very different. And you may have seen on the news, his name is Chris Murray, and he works at the Institute for Health metrics and evaluation up in Seattle. And if you've seen a lot of like the forecasts about the Coronavirus, he's that guy, but basically, he's a data nerd. And I'll tell you the reason I love that book is because I think so many of my students are like, Oh, the way you change the world is to be a doctor. But my feeling is like, I don't know. I mean, what kind of doctor are you going to be? Right? You know, and there's a lot of ways to change the world, I really believe you can be a teacher who exerts an enormous fucking influence on the world. I think you can be a data nerd who saves so many lives. And, again, I find that inspiring it's like, you know, if you have this, if you have this real desire to get something important done, you can. May not be linear, may not be easy, may not look like the way your friends or parents think it should, but, yeah, you can.
Well, before I stop recording, I'm going to say is there anything that off the top of your head, you said that you would like me to omit from the interview?

Cone 49:18
I had one thought, I named my school.

Kiera 49:23
Okay, I'll omit that.

Cone 49:24
Okay. And then I, you know, here's the deal. I talked about rich, white, parents, and sure there'd be a few of them that I wouldn't want to see it, but I can hang with that. I think if you're being honest, as an educator, if you want to see like, you know, what's an obstacle to, you know, radical change, it’s oftentimes the people with the most prestige and power and that would be rich, white, parents.

Kiera 49:48
Okay. And then the interview will be transcribed, and the audio and visual recording will be deleted immediately after that. Transcriptions created in the research collected for this study will not be used for any purpose besides senior thesis.

Cone 50:07
You're not gonna make a big fancy movie out of this and become a millionaire!?

Kiera 50:12
Yeah, and I’m going to give you no credit!

Recording Ends.

LEWIS

Recording Begins.

Kiera 0:00
Okay, so do I have your consent to record this interview?

Lewis 0:04
Yes, you do.

Kiera 0:06
Okay, so, um, if you'd like me to use a pseudonym to refer to you. what name would you like me to use?

Lewis 0:17
You can just call me Lewis.
And then can you share, if comfortable, your gender identity, how you identify racially, and whether you consider yourself a young adult, middle aged adult, or senior?

I’m a middle-aged, white, man.

Okay. And what is your educational background? So where did you get your B.A. and your teaching credential?

I got my B.A. at Oregon and I was in, Race, Class, and Ethnic Perspectives, Social Work and Sociology, with a minor in Mathematics and then got my Master's in Education, or might have been a Master's in Teaching, at the University of Washington with an emphasis in grades 6 to 12 mathematics instruction.

And how long have you been teaching at the high school level and what subject do you currently teach? Have you taught other subjects previously?

I have been teaching for 25 years at the high school level I've been teaching I've taught everything, and the whole scope and sequence from pre-algebra all the way to Calculus, over the years, and my focus over the last almost 20 years has mostly been statistics.

And finally, for the for the preliminary questions, what inspired you to be a teacher, or did you have any mentors that heavily influenced your journey to education?

Wow, that's a great question. I never thought I'd be a teacher did not grow up thinking I'd be a teacher My dad was a principal and inner-city school in Washington DC, I had zero interest in going into education so the, the only reason that led me there was I always wanted to do Peace Corps, and with my skill set and with my background I was a civil engineer or student for two years so I had all this math, so my background for the course-load that I took, they were in a huge need for math teachers so because I had the ability to understand and communicate mathematics, I thought I would just try it to be able to experience Peace Corps. Little did I know that it would just take me on this whole career path so, it was more a backdoor entry into education, where I wanted to go to South Africa and experience different cultures and histories and language and how to live, you know in a mud hut and wanted to experience Peace Corps during the 1990s, when it was, you know apartheid was crumbling and there's new elections and, again, little did I know it was, it was the hook. That got me sold on the, on the education, the career.
Okay, so that was the first section. And now we're going to do the main teaching questions. Okay, so do you try to inspire critical thinking within your students? It'll be interesting cause it's math which I haven't interviewed yet so I'm kind of curious how you do that, if you do that, or what your current teaching style is and if it's changed at all?

Lewis 4:44
That's a broad question, with critical thinking, I primarily focus on trying to get students to be critical thinkers and with teaching statistics, I think it's like you could teach mathematics or statistics by teaching like, methods, where you can teach algorithms like how to do things without ever getting into the why you do it or when you do it. So, I find myself constantly trying to create assessments and like, data sets to get them to think critically upon not only what they're doing like the whole mathematic algorithms behind what they're doing, manipulating variables or using normal CDF like trying to find area in a curve, but what the hell that means like, what is this implication of what you're trying to discover. So you try to do it with real life data sets where, where they care about outcomes, and the topics, whether it's, you know, social justice or climate change or animal densities or whatever… and that gets that critical thinking piece in there. When they kind of learn… when they build up that knowledge. So that was the critical thinking piece, and then you asked a question about my teaching style… Would you say that again please?

Kiera 6:24
Yeah, like do you have a current teaching style or pedagogy. Like, do you have strategies that you're like, “this is what I do usually.”

Lewis 6:34
That's true. I do you have pedagogy there is this way of teaching called constructivism, which kind of builds scaffolding for students to kind of piece together their own understanding of things, which actually ties into the critical thinking because if you - like you don't want to just hold their hand all the time and march them to the answer, because then they are not building any knowledge. But you don't want to just make them march in any direction they want to because they'll never… I mean, it will take them forever to get to the outcome. So, you do have to give them like a roadmap, or you as a constructivist you have to give them a structure. And then in that structure or that I like to use the word, scaffolding and that – scaffolding, when you're building something, students are building something within the scaffolding but the scaffolding kind of allows them to access, access all part to that. And then, as they progress, they build their own understanding which gives them more freedom or flexibility to kind of make sense of it as they want to make sense of it, and you do it through context so that's that is also the, like, the contextual application of what you're teaching like the environmental science or you could use politics, I mean there's so many charged topics that you can you can root into what you're teaching into, which gets their attention.

Kiera 8:13
Okay, so how much of ‘you’ do you display to your students, or in other words how much are you authentically yourself while teaching. Do you grapple with wearing your ‘teaching hat’ and your ‘Lewis hat’ and where do you draw the line?
Lewis 8:54
Gosh, that’s another good question, you got good questions! You come up with these? I should be interviewing you. Early in my career, I think I wanted to be liked. So, it's a little bit harder when you're closer to their age of, like, you know, it feels good to be the popular teacher, you know, but I do think you sacrifice some power when you do that, when I say power, power to influence. Because to influence you got to be able to influence when people don't want to be influenced. You have to be able to set a line and know that that line is not even going to be thought about crossing, so in time I developed that a little bit better, where I would keep myself a little bit more separate from the students. Now, at the same time, like we just reopened right, so we would have all these, these department chairs would get together and talk about “maybe we should use the first week to do social emotional approach with students like get to know them” all that kind of stuff. And then the conversation came back to me, “Lewis, you have a wonderful relationship with students. What do you do to build that” And then it's like, look, I don't do like - I don't really share much about myself unless it's just these organic stories that come out through, through banter like, they have to happen in the classroom, I don't do icebreakers, I don't do ‘get to know you’ cards, I don't do any of that - they're kind of gimmicky, I don't think they're authentic. I think if a teacher is authentic, you don't need to worry about that kind of stuff, whether you talk about yourself, or not. So, it's a weird combination where I don't think on the outside, I do the typical things that teachers do when they go to a workshop and they learn how to get to know your students. But at the same time, my guard is quite down, I don't think there's really that much of a difference between Mr. Lewis and Brad, except like a spectrum of, like, there is a spectrum there where it's a combination where, if I'm 100% Brad, I say whatever I want to say. But when I'm Mr. Lewis, then I do got to be careful because not everyone is where you're at when it comes to thinking about certain topics or not everyone can be called me so you got to kind of be careful, because you want to teach all the students so you got to kind of mold yourself more into this universal Mr. Lewis, that even suppresses some of your own thoughts and ideas and opinions, because it's what's best for kids. So, there is that balance of going back and forth, but it's not that balance because I got to protect me and you know what I mean it's more about, I got to protect the students like I have to kind of be a little bit more malleable in order to be able to reach every student, even the ones that are hard headed, and you don't like, and they're not putting the work in, you still gotta try to reach them so, the only way to do that is really kind of, you know, it ain't about you, sort of, so to speak, you know? Okay, I think I answered.

Kiera 12:36
I'm just curious when you say certain topics, do you mean like, if it were to get political or like what? Is that where you draw the line? Or like what did you mean?

Lewis 12:48
Well, I'm totally fine with politics, except I can't use my pulpit to proselytize as they say you can't use your teaching pulpit – your platform – as an influential teacher to preach your personal beliefs, so I have even though – let’s just take Trump for instance, I can't stand that man, right, and everything he represents. I can't really let that out, because I may have students in there that are in a minority in our school, where their parents were very pro-Trump and they are themselves considered republicans even though no one at that age really knows what the fuck is going on like, who they are and you know they're developing, I shouldn't cuss -
Kiera 13:44
No, you’re fine - everyone has. My transcription said that you said font, so don’t worry. Oh wait, actually, no, no, no, now it says fuck.

Lewis 14:09
I’d have to keep those kids in otherwise I’m going to push them away so I could talk about things like equity or, you know, like women should be respected without actually calling his name out, so, it's a fine line there, because I will ultimately protect the minority voice in my room and in this case it's the trump kids you know. So, I don't really have a line, I tend to go to the line, a lot. And probably push beyond it more than I should, but I think I can get away with it because I have such good standing at the school and the community, but I think people give me the benefit of doubt you know I never really get parent complaints, it's like I really feel like once you establish who you are, as a teacher - I do know some teachers, no matter what they do - I know some very hardworking teachers that spend so much time preparing and try to help kids - they say one bad joke, and they have five parents complaining to the admin. Where I will cuss sometimes and apologize and I will, you know, as I’ll talk about politics, I'll do things that I know cross the line and I'll get an email and I'll apologize that I did go over the line and no one ever does, so I don't know if it's one of those, you know reputation as a teacher of being fair uh goes a long way, and it's almost unfair to some other colleagues who lost that reputation, and at that point they’re buried in it and there's nothing they can do, where I could take a poo on the ground and people go, “wow that was so cool to see him do that, you really try to get them to be critical thinkers.”

Kiera 16:12
Yeah. Okay, cool. Great way to end that question. Um, okay, and then, you kind of touched on like the power to influence, but in a different way with talking about power, what role does discipline play in your classroom and how do you engage with the power, or assumed and real power, you hold as an authority figure as a teacher?

Lewis 16:45
God, these are good! Havill, you’re freakin’ good!

Kiera 16:48
Yeah, I know…

Lewis 16:52
I will say, I read this book when I was in school that pretty much - I only read this book because one of my mentor teachers gave me this book and said, “you seem to have this philosophy of this particular kind of teaching type, and they call it the warm demander, which is you have incredibly high expectations, and you are clear, you know, and you don't, you're okay with kids failing. I mean it's like kids need to fall. You don't hold their hands and save them all the time. Very clear expectations, yet at the same time, the students know you're very warm you care about them. The only reason why you're doing this is for their best interest so even if they're being pushed - think about coaching it's the same thing as coaching, very strict coach - kids would run through a wall for me because they knew I was doing it for them. You know there's a difference between being like an asshole strict, whether they roll their eyes and kind of go
through, but when they buy into the message then you can influence them, they'll meet their goals, because I don't think students have a clue what their own ceiling is, they don't. They've never been there before. So, how do they ever get there until you raise their ceiling three times higher than they think they can go and then help them get there and then that's where the growth comes or that, that's that growth mindset, I know you don't think you can do it. I know you can do it. Just experience it once. And then, yes, you may fall five times on the way there, but you'll get there and then you are now at this next level of your own growth model. I don't use those words but, that's clearly it. It's also funny with discipline, I don't really, I don't have rules and my fucking classroom I don't, I have zero spoken rules, except maybe put your phone away, but it's mostly just based on respect right, respect the learning environment. If someone makes a question and someone else laughs, I'm gonna get on the person that laughed because one person is being brave and one person just kind of sitting in the background. And then I'll call on that next kid who laughed as they will give me your thoughts, either realize that we're all vulnerable in this process. But, if a kid does break a rule, don't really do anything except I stopped talking and then he gets deathly quiet in the room. And then I just stare at the kid. And then the kid kind of realizes it already knows what they did wrong, but I'm not going to engage him in the game like I do that, I didn't do. I'm not gonna do that little game, and I'll just wait for them to put their phone away or whatever and then I just go back to teaching and then it never comes up again. It's a weird, like you were in my classroom, I don't really have rules. I don't know why the kids be...
gonna be happy, like, I'm going all in. You know, I'm writing up referral slips, I'm trying to get you detention, because I don't have time for this and I am not gonna play this game every day. So then it's over, it never happens again, it's like wow, this dude ain't playin. And it's respectful. And you, it's rational, and it's authentic. And then, and then everyone else is listening. They're like, “fuck I don't want to be that guy.” and he's advocating for my education. But it takes a friggin lifetime to come up with this, right, like it's not smooth at the beginning when I did my, my, like when I taught South Kitsap it’s tough schools down there. And, you know, it took a while to manage classrooms, and I always would try to - I always felt like managing a classroom 80% of it is having good use of class minutes, great instruction where kids don't want to miss… Like if you're doing a bullshit color in a map, kids are gonna be off task. But if you're doing stuff where they're finding value and oh my god, I got five minutes it's time, but I got to do this one thing and then we're moving on to this other thing and then like there's no room for them to kind of goof up, that takes care of 80% of it because if you don't use the class minutes then even the good kids are gonna start talking.

Kiera 25:34
Okay, so you kind of touched on this too but, like connecting your lessons and statistics to the real world, or like can you just expand on that and I think it's significant that you do head the Social Justice League too, so just, I was wondering whether you could like if those are related, or if you could just talk about them?

Lewis 26:03
Oh, they are, so it's like, so most of what you do as a teacher is in the classroom, but most of what you do about connections is outside the classroom, right yeah, I can make connections in the classroom, but I get to really know students when I take them to South Africa and show them that the curriculum can be applied to some pretty cool stuff. And you see them outside of this venue, called a school building. If I do Social Justice League we take them to homeless shelters so then you have opportunities to kind of see them in different parts of the world where their eyes open up, it's kind of intimidating seeing these crazy homeless shelters is overwhelming sometimes they go to South Africa, it's, it's coaching, you know, you see students in this entirely different venue of competitiveness, and all three of those just again gives you more power and respect in the classroom because a) you have a relation, a relationship with you know, half the students in your room have either been to South Africa or Peru, or I’ve coached them, or Social Justice League, so you already know them and then the other kids want to get to know you like that. So, there's that connection piece, but then it just gives you context, you know what I mean like what we do in the classroom isn't really the… what is it called? The end to the means is a means to the end. It's a means to the end of the application bit. We're not doing this in some arbitrary get a grade… and we're doing this because a) there's amazing applications out in the world. And then b) you're just trying to kind of get your ship filled with cargo and then you're going to venture off into the world and see it and you want supplies. This little high school classroom ain't really shit when it comes to livin’, you're just you're just getting ready to go. So, whether it's the educational knowledge or whether it's the perspective of seeing other cultures or whether it's, it's the reflection of competitiveness… and again, I mean, you know, all that kind of stuff just gives you, you know, bookmarks or color to what you're teaching. It's weird too because it's really, I'm teaching stats… if I go to a dinner party. And they go, “hey what do you do?” And I say, “I teach.” “What do you teach” If I say math, or even worse statistics, you
should look on their face. I mean they don't give us any more on that conversation. Because, like, they see as this two dimensional, you know, just learning how to manipulate variables or statistics can be so dry. The fact that Bainbridge High School has more kids signed up for statistics, AP statistics than any other effin’ course at the school? What is that about, because statistics in and of itself is not really a fascinating vibrant… it ain’t humanities, it ain’t environmental studies, it's not this cool stuff that we want to touch… it's T scores and P values. So, you need a little bit of context. Okay, it's cool. You know, and that's the challenge but I think it comes with all with all the other things is because you got to sell yourself as is multi-dimensional, instead of the stick figure teacher that lives in the building and teaches your little math, I mean think about math teachers, who work on a two dimensional… folks that like uh who knows what they do, besides just love math I don't even like do they I don't know what they share with students or, or how students see them but they seem as this two dimensional teacher, where ya go in there and they teach me how to do this little math-y thing and then that's it, really? There's no more to it there aren't stories there's no context, there's no adventure.

Kiera 30:47
How do you implement the things you're talking about specifically?

Lewis 30:53
I just did it. Just wanted to do it. And then I would find like, I've always had good relationship with principles, I will push boundaries, and as soon as someone would say no, I would say, “Okay, I'm gonna do it so I believe what's best for kids is giving them…” so I don't want you to tell me like what liability issues it could be, just tell me how I can do it like, what do I need to do in order to get this going. You know, think about like, if we have to fill out like five permission slips to put kids on a bus to take them to the Bainbridge Island History Museum… I take these students to fucking homeless shelters, and there's like tuberculosis and crazies and cops come every time and I'm like, I don't know how they let me do this, I created a permission slip saying “Hey, just so you know, this is a club, you know, a, it's a club experience, Mr. Lewis will be there, but there's certain risks, you got to know it…” and whether those permission slips will be accepted if something bad happens, I don't know… but the district or principal will kind of say okay just do it and be safe, you know what I mean, because they see the value in it but it's pushing the boundaries. To do these trips? Oh my god, the risks we take? In a sense of just going to do these things, because when you, when you go study wildlife, you see how these people live right they're living on this mountain where you have all of these deadly snakes, and there's a leopards that walk around, there's leopards that - look at what's going on Bainbridge Island with one fucking Bobcat right. It is like, “oh my god that Cougar! Watch out there! Be careful!” I'm thinking we live on a mountain where there's like more leopards per square kilometer than almost anywhere else on the continent. And we're fine with it because, you know, you respect nature you understand nature, they don't track humans and eat fucking humans. You just got to be smart about it and know, you know, like, how to protect yourself and how to go in groups and all that kind of stuff. Yeah, there’s Black fucking Mamba, if you get bitten by Black Mamba you'll die, yes okay I get it, but how many times have you been bitten by a Black Mamba in the history of that mountain in the last 80 years? I think there was one bite. It wasn't even on the mountaintop. So yes, it happens but it's this rational fear, if you want to really look at it, I think there were 250,000 deaths by automobile. So, every time I see a car I’m gonna go “oh my god!! 250,000 deaths!”? No. Matter of fact, I was talking to a math colleague about this. Oh, watch out
for the cougar I think just pull out your phone and Google number of deaths by cougar in the last 100 years in our state, I think there was one. They’re like okay. Why are we acting this way about wildlife, yet you don't act this way about automobiles? Not only that, why don't you Google death by depression or suicide in the last 100… so we shouldn't be more worried about being depressed or not living a full life, because that will kill you. We are freaking out when it's the cougar, which gives us more vitality and life than anything else, because it shows you have a healthy ecosystem for God's sake, so, I've got really sidetracked on that conversation, so talking about… so then we created a nonprofit, just to go ahead and do these trips, so it's not a school activity. Yet at the same time the school district loves what we do. Because parents and students love what we do, it's part of the, the coolness which is Bainbridge High School experience right where you can not only study two years stats or environmental science but go to these field sites. So, they love it but they're not going to make it a school district thing, because they don't want to get sued. If you're a nonprofit, LLC, and you don't really make any money on this stuff so if you if your business gets sued, you don't make any fucking money! What are you going to sue? There's no, there's no, there's no equity in your business, the money comes in and goes out there's nothing there. We do it because a) we're good teachers and b) we get away with it because everyone loves what we're doing and c) we really put our time into trying to keep people safe until you're at the hotel fucking room at the end of the big trip, and you pet a domesticated dog and you take it’s ball and get bit, and then you get a rabies shot because your parents don't understand, you know, “wild dog and Africa!”, and it’s like, okay I see it.

Kiera 37:13
Who was that??? Let's not disclose any names…

Lewis 37:20
Yeah, that was you. That was our biggest worry ever on any of our trips was domesticated dog bite at a hotel.

Kiera 37:31
Okay, so, I'm just curious because I feel like, correct me if I'm wrong, but from what you've shared, it seems like you're potentially more excited or passionate about what you're doing outside of the classroom walls, is that correct?

Lewis 37:58
Um, keep going?

Kiera 37:59
Well, I guess I'm just wondering like, how do you, or from what you've learned are your experiences outside of the classroom walls. Like, how do you get the students to like, wake up and see that there is so much more out there?

Lewis 38:35
I don't know, that's a great question and I don't know the answer. Like, why do parents and students just trust us so much to like go across the fucking world, and do whatever? I would expect way more questions when we have parent night and shit like that. So that whole trust piece is big, right? I have C who teaches band and wants to take them on a ferry to go to Seattle
to work in an orchestra, and there is a parent conference meeting about information - you should hear the questions to come on those things right to catch a fucking ferry to go to Seattle to play at some sort of whatever, right, like with us, maybe they just don't even have a construct. I am back and teaching in person now, and let me tell you, I love just teaching. So, I love teaching - I'm not coaching anymore. I haven't been able to do any social justice, because of the homeless shelter and COVID restrictions. I, by the time I get back to South Africa, it would be three years since I've set foot on our camera grid on that mountain. I'm not doing any of that stuff now, and I love being in the classroom, because that is where it all happens. So, you know, I wouldn't want to say I'm more passionate about the outside of the classroom stuff, I do think, I love that because it gives me an opportunity to get to know the students but none of that happens, if not for the foundational work you do in the classroom, right, so it enhances all that stuff. And it's reciprocal and it comes back to the classroom but if I was just teaching, I would still find so much joy because I have all that other experience I can bring into the classroom, you know. Also, you see the students growth, you see them kinda stepping up, you challenge them. They're trying to figure out who they are. I do think we coddle our students, our kids in these generations more than any other generation, we protect them parents advocate for them. They’re fucking 19, 18, 17 years old and I got moms calling me to figure out what they're missing. And I'm like, come on. This kid needs to grow the eff up and own their thing. Failure is an option, I'll let you fail, I'll work my ass off to get you somewhere, but if you don't even, you know, show up I can't help you. But I love the classroom I don't want to underestimate it's the classroom where the magic happens. You know that that is the source of everything is in that classroom but it's even though it's the foundation, there is so much more you can do with relationships and, and with connections and all that kind of stuff.

Kiera 42:12
And so, I feel like you kind of just answered this, but what would you say are the most rewarding things about teaching?

Lewis 42:30
Wow. Why do I feel good after a good day of teaching? One, it's humbling as shit. Teenagers can be tough. They roll their effin’ eyes at their parents, they're on their phones all the time. They almost are in, developmentally, a situation where they want to rebel against everyone and figure it out themselves, right? The fact that I have the opportunity and trust, where I can somewhat influence and mold, and challenge these young minds and spirits, it's so effin’ cool. I don't know why they let me do it, really. And I don't even know what it is, to tell you the truth because I think I'm just being an authentic human and talking to students, so the fact that you could get them to be kind of silly, like for instance, we're supposed to build community, but I'm not gonna do any kind of gimmicky game so I'm trying to get on these kids’ cases about, “You guys are so effing self-centered,” and “you think it's all about you,” and “it's so hard being on zoom,” and blah, blah, blah. Stop. You should thank your parents. Matter of fact, here's what we're gonna do… and I just created this thing and it's worth zero points. No extra credit. It's just you're going to plan and cook a meal for your parents, right, for your whole family for no other reason other than to just be nice and develop some skills. I don't care what it is, just something. And here's what you got to do. You got to take a picture of yourself and the meal and do a dorky little thumbs up. Okay, and we're going to share it on Google Classroom. And, you know, I guess if you can't manage this just send me a little email, but everyone did it - they did it this was during
zoom when everyone was feeling a little crazy, we got back to class and the things they wanted to ask him about in class was like, “so when could we start dinner with Lewis again? I thought, oh my god, are you kidding me? I don't know what it is, I find that trust that little thing, whatever that is unbelievably humbling, and it feeds me, and if I was teaching and I'm fighting the kids every day, fuck that, that's no fun. I've been there before where it takes forever to develop that relationship. Now don't get me wrong, you know 90% of what happens in my classroom is focused on the content, but if that's all I did, you know I would be bored and, you know, and they would be bored, and I would just be like everybody else. You know, so I think it's that other thing, which I don't have a word for, but it is fun. It is fun where you develop a little environment, a little family in that classroom. Look at you and I, right, and your family and your sister, like that I get to know you guys through, you know, coaching, South Africa, I get to know your parents, and now I'm like a family member, you know, that is what's cool about teaching, ya know?

Kiera 47:33
Okay, cool. Have you experienced burnout and what are some strategies, if you have some, to mitigate burnout? What keeps you going when you have those really hard days and are like, “why am I doing this?”

Lewis 48:40
I have not had a day like that in decades. It has really been a freakin’ long time. You do get those, let me warn you, you get those a lot at the beginning, because you don't have skills yet, you don't know how to connect yet, you don't know what the fuck you're doing yet, and it is hard, and there's grading, there’s how do you manage the workload, how do you manage everything. And on Sundays I would get bellyaches, I didn't want to go face them again because I felt like I was fighting them, you know. That's hard. I think I put too much weight on wanting to be liked, you know, there’s all kinds of traps you can get into where you forget that you are the authority, they’re not. And I give a shit way more about them respecting me than liking me so I'm going to be what I am. And I'm going to focus on the content and move forward, you know, I don't need to be fun. I don't need, I don't show spirit. I don't do the games I do no gimmicks, zero. And for some reason it works, so you have to develop your own thing, there was another math teacher, he was so different than me, but he was authentic, and kids loved him, so there is not one way to do it. You just have to be you. And do it fully authentically you're not doing because you read a book or whatever, it just it's your it's your inner song it comes out, and can students see it. That authentic thing carries weight so once you get that you, you don't get burnt out really because you're just doing your thing. If you're fighting students all the time, you're burnt out a lot. I remember in England, I would go out on Fridays with my mates, a bunch of teachers, 12 of us, and just drank and walked home and laughed about it and shared our shit, like the kids, you know, just get up and walk out the window, you know what I mean? It's funny. So, camaraderie is huge. I've always had good camaraderie with my staff, you have fun and laugh with your colleagues, because then you're all in it together. That one is huge. Burnout comes early, the first five years or major you'll lose teacher in the first five years if you make it through the first five years, I think you got it. You know what I mean. So, you know, try to give yourself perspective, have outside activities where it's not all about what happens in there, be physical, go on trips, hike, bike, laugh, play basketball, and have friends, and just balance work as a 30-year life. You know, if you make it 80% of your life, and then it's driving you effing
crazy then you're going to get depressed, you know, people just they quit. And drink. I wasn't kidding. Those would be good Dave Matthews concerts, drinking at the gorge and just let go, you know, yeah.

Kiera 52:36
Okay, perfect. So, we're almost finished. I created this word called *inspiragination*, and it's in the title of the end inspiration so inspiring imagination. Yeah, so I was just curious if off the top of your head what that means to you and what you think like in the education setting?

Lewis 53:16
I love it. I tell you that when I was a kid, I had a poster used to get posters when you would go buy albums and Bob Dylan would write these songs. It would blow my mind and Bruce Springsteen would do it too. When I was younger, high school, and this poster came out about his profile, Bob Dylan. And it was black and white except he had this big Afro, and the afro was all these colors, like just every curl was like another strip interjected with white and it was like, I thought about that as soon as you said that word is. That is what is inspiration is the imagine the imagination. You have to inspire kids to kind of dream what they can be what their ceiling can hold. If everyone has a bubble about who they are, that bubble is only a certain amount, it only goes about six feet beyond them when you're in high school. They have no clue. The range of influence that bubble can expand to in all directions, until they start being pushed. And they realize they have opportunities and they can imagine who they can be or what they can be. So, you know, I think that's what we do as teachers yes we have content that's the vehicle that's the engine. But we're there to inspire, way more than we are to make sure they understand the distributive property.

Kiera 55:14
Love that. Perfect. Yeah, my definition is just 'moments or experiences and which one is inspired to imagine,’ but, like, that's the obvious definition I feel like. Okay, well I guess I'll just say, is there anything else that you wanted to share that you came into the conversation thinking?

Lewis 55:41
I didn't really know what - I went in with zero preparation.

Kiera 55:47
No, that's fine. I just wanted to provide a space in case there was anything.

Lewis 55:53
I mean, it's students like you to inspire and make it awesome to be a teacher, because, you know anyone interested in being pushed, curious... and they trust you to guide them, that is friggin’ awesome as an educator. Like, you feed us, of like, it's validation that what we’re doing is not just crazy. Yeah. So, thank you for being you.

Kiera 56:37
Thank you.

Lewis 56:39
My pleasure. We got to teach together one day.

Kiera 56:41
Maybe! I have one last question that's very quick. It's just what is your favorite, and it could be the same book but I'm just creating a book list at the end of the thesis for fun that teachers have recommended. So, I was gonna ask what your favorite like fun book is, or if you had a book that heavily influenced you. You can provide later if you want to think on it.

Lewis 57:11
It's funny because someone else recently asked me about like - I think was a colleague - they were asking about reading and it's like look, when I was in high school… I remember, I was hanging out with some buddies and we're sitting around outside of a fire just about a month ago, and they're talking about the high school experience and they're like, Lewis, you were wild as fuck in high school, right? So, what the heck got you even into college and stuff and I talked about this one teacher. I was always smart, but I was a piece of shit right, I would just not do my work and you know, ‘this is all bullshit.’ She had patience, she was very warm, I remember she was a demander. She wouldn't let me f-about, but she was very kind, I knew she had my best interest. We had to do this big thesis paper my junior year, I was like fuck this, like read a novel and I was like my only inspiration is Bruce Springsteen right, and his lyrics the stuff he writes in his songs speaks to me. I thought she would say well we need to read a novel, but she goes, why don't you do a thesis on the development of his characters, because he always tells stories in his albums, and the development of his characters over the progression of his albums, my, my jaw dropped, I think, are you kidding me? Okay. And I just, I put so much work into that. And she gave me like an A and gave me all this feedback and I was like, “Oh my god, maybe I can do this.” It blew my mind. So, I don't know if that answered your question, because that got me into thinking or it at least get into college and that got me into Peace Corps. Now, while I was in Peace Corps, I started to read, and I never read before and there were books that blew my friggin mind. I read the entire trilogy of Lord of the Rings. That was incredibly influential incredibly about storytelling and bravery and, and, you know, all that kind of stuff about the battle of good and bad. Then I read, while in the middle of South Africa, Steven Biko’s book, Cry Freedom, about Black consciousness and struggle, and then I read this book for so long, it was one of my favorite called, Cry The Beloved Country, that was also a book about South Africa, and then, My Traders Heart. My Traders Heart was one of the biggest, like, ‘come to Jesus’ moments because the writer was Ryan Milan, and he was a white South African growing up in white South Africa and his great, great, grandfather, Milan, was one of the architects of Apartheid. And he would talk about as a beat reporter, just the conflict and brutality of race in South Africa and all these brutal stories of people being butchered and… but his perspective on it - it was like one of my favorite books. It's not an easy book to read but I loved it. When it comes to truth, when it comes to reflection, when it comes to equity issues, when it comes to identity issues. And I think it just taught me, honesty, and, but there's been so many books. There is another great one. I really got into Cormac McCarthy. He was my favorite authors and there were two books: The Road, which is a brutal post-apocalyptic world about a dad and his son trying to survive. Again, very much, I tend to like the brutal stories but they're very telling about reflection and stuff. And then he wrote another one, No Country for Old Men, made a movie out of both of them. But the books, I just loved, I love the writing style and stuff. I just think they're awesome stories.
Kiera 1:02:26
Well, there's no wrong answer, so. Anyways, thank you so much. If there's anything that you would like me to omit from the interview, I can do so.

Lewis 1:02:58
Oh, that’s okay.

Kiera 1:03:00
Okay. And then I'll just say also that this interview is going to be transcribed and the audio and audio-visual will be deleted immediately after the transcription is created. And the research collected for the study will not be used for any purpose besides the senior thesis.

Lewis 1:03:45
Sweet. Thanks!

*Recording Ends.*

**JEAN-PAUL**

*Recording Begins.*

Kiera 0:00
I'm perfect. Okay, so do I have your consent to record this interview?

Jean-Paul 0:04
You do.

Kiera 0:05
Okay. All right. And then we're just going to do some preliminary questions. So, if you would like me to use a pseudonym to refer to you, what name would you like me to use?

Jean-Paul 0:16
Um, you're welcome to use my actual name. If you're going to use the pseudonym, then let's go with my name in French class when I was in high school, Jean-Paul.

Kiera 0:29
Awesome. Okay, and then if you could, if you're comfortable sharing, provide your gender identity and pronouns as well, how you identify racially/ethnically, and whether you consider yourself a young adult, middle-aged adult, or a senior.

Jean-Paul 0:43
Oh, boy, those are tough questions. Gender identity, I identify as male. My pronouns are he/his, I'm white, and for how I mentally identify myself, I really don't know. I keep like looking in the mirror, and I'm shocked with how I look, because I still think I'm in a young adult, but I'm apparently not. It looks like I'm more like, middle-aged at this juncture. It’s a real bummer.
Kiera 1:17
Okay, thank you. And then, so just some background teaching questions - I know you're not currently a teacher, but you were a high school teacher, correct?

Jean-Paul 1:28
I was a high school teacher. And yeah, I've taught elementary, middle and high, and in university, I currently teach doctoral level students.

Kiera 1:38
Okay, cool. So, first question here is, what is your educational background? Where did you get your bachelor's degree and where did you get your teaching credential?

Jean-Paul 1:48
Uh, education background in terms of career ties to my bachelor's degree. So, my bachelor's degree was from Berklee College of Music, which was part of the Boston consortium of schools. I studied music as my primary major. I studied education as part of that with classes from Harvard University, on education, philosophy, and pedagogy. And in terms of like, the various levels, my credential in California because it's a different credentialing system entirely. My credential in California is from UC San Diego, where I did level one, level two and level three, teaching techniques and supervisory practices, and pedagogical strategies. My admin credential was from National University and my doctorate is from the Mary Lou Fulton's Teacher's College at Arizona State, which is the largest Teacher's College in the US.

Kiera 2:54
Okay, and which subject did you teach in high school? And how long did you teach in high school?

Jean-Paul 3:03
Sure, I taught a variety of subjects in high school. I taught music education, I taught career technical education, including backgrounds in business, in sales and service and in arts, media and entertainment. I taught literature support classes. And more importantly, what I specifically did in most of my time as a high school teacher is help teams in a subject called integrated academics where we would take four or five academic subjects and coordinate their activities together, across platforms. So, you would be studying, The Scream, in your art class, you would be studying about Stravinsky in your music classes, you'll be studying in your history classes about the social strife and tension and ramp up to World War One, you would be looking at various styles of writing including Chekhovian Brevity and other things in your English language arts class, and you would be looking at the development of quantum physics in your science classes, and all of it would be talked about in a coordinated fashion between the subjects so you could relate each one as a high school student and understand how the subjects interacted.

Kiera 4:34
That's really cool. And then what inspired you to be a teacher? So, did you have any mentors that heavily influenced you or what journey to education?

Jean-Paul 5:00
Well, I don't think I have a great story of that. I got into it for the money. I needed a job and I had a background as a teacher's assistant, and when I was in college, there was an opportunity for a part time teaching assignment with a with a Catholic school. And, you know, I was working at night, and I was going to school, and I still needed money, and I got the job as a part time teacher at the elementary school, so I got into it for that reason, which is like, not what most people say. It is what it is. But what kept me in teaching was an education philosophy class, taught by one of our professors from Harvard, and the entire semester, was a deep dive into Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which to this day sits right next to me. It sits right here, and I review it every three years, I reread it. It had such a profound impact on me. And it was understanding the various modes and methods of how education works, inside of social systems, and what it can do, that really started driving me to do things and I didn't start in my next assignment after college, I didn't stay at elementary and I didn't go to middle or high, I actually went to Czechoslovakia, I am taught in their university system for several years, right when communism was ending. And I got to witness first-hand what oppressive education systems look like at their most extreme and how to rebuild them, and how you can design education systems as a means of liberation for people and how they support democracies.

Kiera 7:22
Yeah, that book is… that's what got me thinking, to say the least.

Jean-Paul 7:32
Don't forget the follow up book, *Pedagogy of Hope*.

Kiera 7:35
I don't think - oh my gosh, I didn't read that one.

Jean-Paul 7:40
Yeah, it's fantastic because it's a reflection back, if you look at Freire’s life, there's a lot of what he's talking about in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, but then, most people aren't aware of his history that, you know, he became a minister of education, and then he was exiled from the country and had to leave his own country for years and then eventually was welcomed back, and then was really, you know, revisiting the subjects that were there for his adult literacy programs and revisits that in *Pedagogy of Hope*.

Kiera 8:12
Yeah, I should totally look into that and get it. Thank you. So, along those lines, the main question that I am interested in is, back when you were a high school teacher, did you try to inspire critical thinking within your students and how? Like, what were some strategies that you implemented, if you did?

Jean-Paul 8:34
Sure, so. So, several, and I'll pull up a couple of things, because I was reflecting on this. So, I have two really different backgrounds in terms of high school and I'm not sure my strategies changed too much, but I was working, I’m mostly known for the work I've done in urban school settings. But it's really strange where we are in San Diego, how that plays out and how it functions. So, one school that I was working with in one of my primary teaching assignments
was in a community that was socio-economically among one of the wealthiest communities in San Diego, but because it was among the most wealthy communities in San Diego, nobody with kids could afford to live there any longer. So about 65% of the kids were bussed in from Southeast San Diego and, and qualified for free and reduced lunch, and the second high school that I was working in extensively, where we did all of the high school redesign models and various items was nearly 100% free and reduced-price lunch. The school had been deeply impacted, the community that it was in had been the leading producer of methamphetamines in the United States during the methamphetamine outbreak, and it was a community that was really just trying to heal and move on from that. What I attempted to do with the student groups that I worked with, was, first of all recognize that they needed to become aware of complexity in the world, and social complexity, and needed to start to connect the dots in terms of seeing how their own behaviors and interactions in the world work. So, you know, when I would go through and look through the items, you know, critical pedagogy was a must, which was something that was not popular in the U.S. schools at the time, there was very much a model of direct instruction and a lot of direct instruction. My goal is really using a pair critical pedagogy model and looking at the way Freire had structured things, was to utilize a concept called Socratic Hope, where you join students where they are at their own level, and then you move with them through that, but they have to lead the learning. The goal is, is that they lead the learning and that you're there to support that learning in several ways, you're there as a life coach, you're there as a subject matter expert. But first and more important than anything else, is you're there as an expert of adolescent development, and community resources, so that way you can help them get through it, because if they're not getting their baseline needs met, learning is you know, something else, and you know, we had students that worked jobs to make sure that their families weren't being evicted, I had students that were homeless, and it was a day to day basis trying to figure out where they were going to live. We had students that that were all over the spectrum that were there. So that was the first thing was to engage in critical pedagogy at all times. Now, how we would go through doing that is through everything from looking at how they develop problem formations, and how they framed problems, and if they could reframe problems in multiple ways. I use a concept called deconstruction where we teach students to take a problem or take a meaning as they saw it and deconstruct its value and it's and how it's culturally placed within society. And we would also use high tactile learning experiences, problem-based learning, you know, project-based learning. But all of that was based in the concept of realia and making sure that students would have something that was real and fixed that they could be working on. So, it wouldn't necessarily matter what the project was, it had to be based in progressing a concept from the world and your understanding and your contribution towards it. Whatever it is you developed at the end, had to be functional and usable. You couldn't just throw it away. And at the end of the day, there was always a core academic content block to it, whether you were aware of it or not, whether it be about expository reading and writing, or developing manuals, or practical applications of physics or mathematics, there was that that was in there, but then there was always a social justice and ethics portion to the assignments that that went part and parcel and tried to get them really deeply engaged. The measure of success that we would use as our primary, was the percentage of the lessons that the students would help develop and implement. And with the goal that by about halfway through the year, about 75%, of the lesson planning was student driven. You know, and I'm not joking, like, they would come in, and we would sit down and, and draw up here, so you know, here's where we want to be by ‘X’ years. And here's, here's what the quarter systems look like, here's what a two week look ahead, here's what next week would look like, what are we
going to do if we fall off track? What about students that were not engaging in this way? You know, what do we do when we have a student in our class that has a barrier, that's a barrier beyond their control? They're an English language learner. Would you be able to get through this course if it was being taught in Japanese, because you don't speak Japanese? No. Do you think that should be a reason why you fail the course? No, I don't think it's a reason why I should fail the course I'm learning the language. Great. So why do you have a different standard for this student that's supposed to be your, your fellow student and cohort member? Why do we have these different standards in the U.S., than for other people? So, we would get through all those things, and then determine to a high degree together, how we would address those issues and what we would have to do to get through them. So that that was the measure, the most successful group ended up taking nearly 100% of their learning outcomes as part of it and got pretty adept at writing lesson plans, which was pretty exciting.

Kiera 17:08
Yeah, and what were some of those, out of curiosity, those projects like, relative to the social justice piece, like what would be an example of like some of those things that the students did?

Jean-Paul 17:22
Sure, so it would depend upon what the students' interests were, because I wasn't going to let my interest be the dominant interest. So, anything from cultural awareness and cultural supports, and I'll give you an example of a real-world project they did that just floored me. We talked about how students in different parts of San Diego didn't have access to all of the cultural elements that other students did. So, we specifically took a look of all things at, why there was a deep misunderstanding about operas, and you know, who gets to go see them because they're usually phenomenally expensive and hard to access. And students would say, “Well, I don't like opera.” And the question was do you not like opera because you don't know opera, or do you not like opera because you've been to a bunch of operas, and you decided you didn't want to go to one? Like, these are two different things altogether. Next, do you understand some of the elements of what's there? Do you understand the elements of theater and theatrics? And we went into this long discussion, and one of the things that we talked about was that about 95% of the students had never experienced a live theater or opera in their life. And so, what these students did is they approached the San Diego opera to have an opera written for a seventh-grade level class, and they organized all of the resources to have every seventh grader to go and see the opera. To just see and experience a theatrical act in different ways, and part of that was discussing their own projected feelings of how they thought different students would react and where that came from in society, and what made them think that… what made them think that a Hispanic Latina or Latino student would not necessarily react to the opera? What made them think that perhaps African American or Black student wouldn't… and they'd have to really explore their own deep-seated misunderstandings of society as a whole. And you know, explore why they thought an affluent, white student would be into gangster rap, but somebody that had grown up in a neighborhood that might be known for that would not enjoy something that an affluent, white student would have access to… and get into the social issues, and that's where the harder conversations happen, because they started to become more aware of how ingrained racial and social issues are, into what you're watching on TV, what you're hearing in the radio, what you see, depicted, that's there, you know. I asked all sorts of different questions of them, including what made you think that the opera was going to be in English? Most of them aren't. Well, you
know, for all I care, they could sing in Spanish, I don't, you know, you're making all these
cultural leaps, so that was one that was one of my favorites that they did. Yeah. You know,
others included anything from community outreach campaigns to neighborhood campaigns, I
mean, the school where I'm talking about, specifically, was ‘Madrona’ High School in San
Diego, and the entire school community was really trying to reimagine itself. Madison had been
formed at a school that was part of the baby boomer generation, and they needed schools
everywhere after World War Two, and Madison had been known as this incredible pillar of a
school. They, at one point, ran school all day and all night, that's how many students there was.
They did a double shift with two sets of teachers and the school had fallen into this state of…
almost the entire school community was almost under a depressive state. The school was known
for one thing: playing football, but it wasn't known for academics, it wasn't known for social
justice or engagement. It was essentially known for drugs and fights and other things. And part
of the projects that we would put them on would be about reimagining their own community.
About, you know, the difference that painting a house makes, you know, we had the whole
school repainted all of the exterior elements redone, and then the students would go block by
block, door by door, to offer to help families to get things cleaned up and get things back to a
place that might make them feel safer as they walk to school. Because we would do community
visits, we walked down a block and one house was absolutely immaculate and the next house
had, you know, broken whiskey bottles out front and beer bottles and crack pipes sitting out
front, and we would talk about all those things and work on them together.

Kiera 23:42
Thank you for sharing all of that. Leading into the next question, how much of ‘you’ do you
display to your students, in other words, how much are you authentically yourself while teaching
and interacting with them? Do you grapple with wearing your ‘teaching hat’ versus your
‘Loescher hat?’

Jean-Paul 24:13
So, one of the things I share with the students is I don't I don't leave who I am at home, and then
come and be somebody else, for their sake in the classroom. Who I am is who I am. And I think
it's important and, it's one of the reasons why teaching is so difficult, is even if you think about
talking with teachers, it's not like a lot of other professions. When you talk with a teacher, and
even if you don't know they’re a teacher and you say, you know, tell me about yourself, they
usually lead with I'm a teacher. It's that much a part of who you are. So, I didn't have an
alternative persona that I put into teaching, and I still don't even now. I am who I am. And I'm
just as grumpy at home as I am, when I'm at work, it's no difference whatsoever. What's
important for me is that the learning isn't about me. And I had that from a principal, who was my
first principal, who I went to see, and I just told this story for a group of aspiring administrators
that wanted to know about, you know, interactions with teachers, and I was a first-year teacher,
and I went to see my principal, and I had this whole list of grievances and complaints, and
everything else. And she looked at me and she said, “Oh Jean-Paul, you've made just a kind of a
simple first year mistake. You thought teaching was about you, and it's not. Teaching is about
them. Now, go back to your classroom, think about that for a few hours, and then take a look at
your list of issues, and come back and see me.” And I did that. And I came back, and I was kind
of blown away, because I hadn't thought about it that way. And I said, “I'm failing to reach my
students and here are some of the reasons I think that might be.” And she said, “Now you've got
my attention, and I'm going to be there for you, because this is not uncommon. But we have to understand that we are failing to reach them, because this is about them, this isn't about you.” And I always took that to heart. When I looked at my student group, and I tried to look at each of them as individuals that were within a social system that wasn't designed for individuality. And I would reveal any number of things to my students, so long as it was relevant to their learning. Because it's not about me, right? So, an example is many of my students know about my own learning disabilities. The reason why they know about those things is because there may have been students with IEPs in our classes that may have been struggling, and I don't keep it a secret that I've had learning disabilities, which I was diagnosed very late, and many of my students know that I spent a better portion of my 10th grade year having to learn how to read again, because I hadn't learned it in a way that worked with my particular diagnosis. I would share with them the truth, which is we don't all learn at the same pace and rate. Most of them knew my stories of a girl named ‘D’ who I always admired to death and thought the world of, but she could read something once and memorize it, she had a photographic memory. And I always had to read, whatever she read, I had to read it four times to get to any level of understandings. And it angered me to death as a student that I had to read it four times. And she only had to read it once. Until years later, when I came to a different understanding that memorization and understanding are not one in the same thing. And that I had a deeper understanding of the materials because I had to go back and read things over and over and over again. And with each reading, I would get to a different level and that I just didn't understand because I had misinterpreted things around a social norm that how hard or easy something was what was more important than understanding the material. So, I was always transparent with my students so long as they understood that it was about me joining them in their own struggle. It's not about them coming to my struggles. And that was sort of at the core of have everything that I tried to do. I'm not sure I was the best model of some of that, because sometimes my workdays were 14 or 15 hours, because if a student was really in trouble and not finding a way out, I wasn't leaving until I got them to a place that was a resting place where they could, you know, leave for the evening, and then we could continue the work. So, I'm not sure I'm a model of sustainability, but that was at the core of everything I did, was making sure there was a really strong relationship, and that my students knew that, even when we had a conflict, that I cared for them, and I loved them, and that I saw in them a potential that they didn't see necessarily, because they didn't have the perspective that I had yet, but I was going to get them that perspective. Right, I had a different vantage point, I had several years on them, I had been through a lot of different experiences, so I had a platform where I could see all of the greatness within them, even when they were going through a period of their life where… a period where you probably need that the most, but you have at the least. I mean, in many ways, it's much easier to be a fourth or fifth grader or sixth grader than it is a 10th or 11th grader.

Kiera 31:40
And kind of related to that, how did you, given that you put in so much effort into the students, beyond what like a “normal teacher” would, one would say, how did you, or did you experience burnout and how did you mitigate that, or what strategies did you use to face that exhaustion in putting in that effort?

Jean-Paul 32:11

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Sure, um, you know, first, I put in systems. I essentially had the equivalent of an IEP file for every student. I know that sounds crazy, I had over 150 students on my roster at one time when I ran the small school, so after I was done teaching, I ran a small high school and I still had, you know, 400 files of each kid. It had nothing to do with your typical filing date, it wasn't their cum-record where I was looking at, you know, what they had done before and their behavioral records, I really didn't care about that. Factually speaking, I only would send kids to the office on what we call the 'positive referral,’ which is I wanted their behavior to be known for how good it was, so I would write a positive referral, and send the kids to the office to explain why they were being sent to the office to share their amazing work. If there was a problem with a student, I never push that into the office. I wanted that to remain between the student and I, and how we dealt with it. You know, ways I dealt with it… Summer months were very much about me and walking away from things. But, you know, depending upon where I was in my career, one was making sure that there were times of the day that I was expressively focused on studying the craft of teaching. Every day. I used to record my teaching practices, I used to play them back. I used to ask for feedback. And so really honoring the craft and tradition to making sure I was getting better at what I was doing, and I wasn't just working harder. Two would be noting the signs of exhaustion and making sure that you were doing your best to set aside time for yourself in whatever fashion made sense to you. I went through different phases. I'm in COVID phase right now, so there's not a lot for me to do. But there would be times where I would run five miles a day or go spend time at a gym for an hour and a half. It depended on where I was in my life. I mean because, you're a teacher, sure. Many of us also get married and have children of my own, I've got four. So, you know, making sure that there were some things that I did. So, I wasn't hypocritical even in my practice, like I was insistent that I had to be able to read to my children every night. Because I had asked for all of my families, to engage in literacy, you can't ask your families to do something, and you do something different. So, looking at those things, but I think the most important thing I did was very early on, as I set aside, daily and weekly structured time for critical reflection, on my own practice, and what I was doing for students and families. And by structured I meant, I mean, there was a daily thing, where 15 minutes was set aside, of just quiet time to really dive in deep on what's there. But every Monday before students arrived, I did about 30 to 40 minutes of really thinking about them and what's there. When it got to be like Saturday, just like setting aside some time to reflect on the week. And by a critical reflection, I mean, you have to review both the stuff that was hard where you failed, and to learn to accept that the only true failure is not engaging in trying again, so just learning to take the setback, but also then celebrating the progress. You know, depending upon your style, figure out what works for you, I used to do it with some just quick journal notes and leave myself so I could go back and trace and look at what was there. But the point was, is that you would critically reflect. The other things I did was I established informal networks of other teachers, not at the school site. So that way, it wasn't something where you're dealing with whatever is the drama and the teacher's lounge, or people talking about, you know, what the retirement packages are looking at or other things I wanted to keep my focus on kids and teaching, so I kept an informal network that I would interact with, and frankly, to this day, I have several informal networks of school superintendents and leaders that I still I interact with on, this is gonna sound silly, on a daily basis, like, I have, like four WhatsApp room groups that are established and you know, people check in on a daily basis. I various other networks, so that way, we're just… we're not spiraling out of control alone. Those were my primary strategies.
Kiera 38:29
Wow, thank you. Thank you so much. What are the key differences for you between a good teaching day and a bad teaching day? And what are the most rewarding things for you about teaching?

Jean-Paul 38:54
Good teaching days… that is a day where all the students are there, a bad teaching day is a day where they're not and you don't know where they've gone. And I mean that literally, I've had students pass away, I've had students in extreme conditions, it's when they're not there, I worry about them. And so, when they're there, that's pretty much a good teaching day. I don't care about anything else. It's about safety and security and knowing that you're having opportunity to reach them. Bad teaching day... you have to learn to cope with and deal with. And then you either decide that you live with the condition as it is, or you go explore the home environment, knock on the door and figure out what the hell is going on. So those are those are my answers for good and bad teaching days.

Kiera 39:50
Then the second part was what are the most rewarding things for you about teaching?

Jean-Paul 39:57
You know, it's not the things in the moment. The things in the moment are fleeting, right, because you're always going to have the win of right now. I think as I got further and further into teaching, I came to realize that the impact you have on your students’ lives can't be measured in high school graduation rates, or standardized test scores, or any of these things. Those are very much like, feel good for me now thing. The most rewarding things have been meeting my students years later, and encountering them as mothers and fathers, and seeing how things turned out, and looking at whether we imparted a way of thinking that has served them well so they can grow in into being this sort of person that's meaningful to them. And I've had a lot of interactions with those students, that are former students that now, in some cases, have worked for me, that have gone on to teach and have worked for me or have their children in one of my schools, and getting to know them. It's just getting to that point in your career, and it happens as a high school teacher pretty quick, because you're dealing with, you know, 14 through 18-year-olds, and, you know, by the time you've taught four or five years, you already have some former students that have decided to have children and to move into a different modality in their life. So, so watching all of that is the most rewarding.

Kiera 42:03
Okay. And then I have just a couple questions left. So, I created this word called, *inspiragination*, combining inspire and imagination to describe an experience I had back in my first year in college. But there's no wrong answer, I was just wondering you when you first heard it, like what you think it means?

Jean-Paul 42:34
Inspir…? Inspirag…?

Kiera 42:36
Inspiragination, I can type it if you want.

Jean-Paul 42:38
Yeah, it's for ash. You got to enter this into the Webster's competition.

Kiera 42:48
It's combining inspire and imagination together.

Jean-Paul 42:52
Yeah. My guess for the meaning would be an individual or situation that inspires you to perform at a peak level and be able to imagine new ways of being or new ways forward.

Kiera 43:19
Thank you. That's kinda like, because I'm not obviously a teacher yet, but it's like, there's just that art or that magic that you can't even really explain sometimes. And I'm just trying to figure out like, what is that? What is that piece? So, I don't think this word is even close, but it's the closest thing I got right now. Okay, and then I just wanted to create a space for you to share anything that we didn't get a chance to discuss? If you were like, “Oh, I was that was on my mind. And she didn't ask the question that prompted it.” But if there's nothing there, then that's totally okay too, I just wanted to create space.

Jean-Paul 44:16
Um, I don't think there's anything specific. Other than it, you know, if you're going into teaching, make a commitment to do it for eight years.

Kiera 44:24
Why eight years?

Jean-Paul 44:27
Because two things, first of all, I'm sure at some juncture you've run across this statistic of how many teachers quit the profession before five years. Why eight years… because that's when it starts to get good. That's when it starts to be something that is really deep and meaningful, and if you can get to year eight, and just make that commitment, that's when things definitively change. It will go through a cycle. First year, you're going to live on adrenaline and excitement. Second year, is usually bipolar, you're either really happy or feel like you're horrible, happy, horrible, happy, roller coaster back and forth. Third year, most people achieve tenure by third year at public schools. But because the first two years were so rough, they're trying to get into a routine. And oftentimes, by the end of the third or fourth year, they may leave without realizing that it's just about ready to start to get much better. And by your fifth year, it is getting better, you just don't realize it. And then your sixth year you start to get critical about your practices, and how sustainable they are. And by year seven, and eight, you're starting to roll. But I think what teacher’s college does sometimes, is it tells us you know, now you've been equipped with all the skills you're going to need in order to be a successful teacher. That's like telling somebody who just completed medical school, “Oh, yeah, you don't need to do any more training. You're all good. You're ready to go into surgery.” No, you're not. You need to go into your internships and your residencies, and you need to have, you know, rounds and you need to learn you need to do
all these things. You're going to do all that for another four or five years, and then you're going to go into practice. And that's what we don't do well, for teachers.

Kiera 46:42
Yeah. Okay, I got eight years with circles around it on my paper. Perfect. Thank you.

Jean-Paul 46:49
Make it to year eight, you're all good.

Kiera 46:51
And then the last question is just, if you had any, off the top of your head, just like favorite fun books, or any books that heavily influenced you… I'm just making a book lists at the end for fun compiling all these awesome teachers and their books that influenced them.

Jean-Paul 47:14
Sure. All right. So, I'm looking around because I'm sitting in my library right now. So, you can't see it on camera, but to my left, and my right, I'm surrounded by books. I think for a book that really was a great eye opening one for me, is a book called The Power of Their Ideas, by Deborah Meyer. Really kind of reminded me of how incredibly powerful student voice can be within design concepts. The other one that inspired me a great deal, I wouldn't say is as fun, but it let me let me feel not so alone on the topic of school reform, is the last book by Neil Postman called The End of Education. And Postman points out that, you know, a lot of American public schooling has no defined end result that it's seeking. And because it doesn't, it really leaves the system in this nebulous state, you know, we we're not really sure what's there. Even a book that through the pandemic has been comforting, because, you know, a lot of parents are talking about I want in person learning. Well, it's because it's not in person learning, they're seeking it's child-care that they're seeking. And, you know, to really get into some of Postman's concepts of you know, we're not really sure why we have schools, you know, so, if you feel confused at times, and you're not really sure about what's there, don't worry about it. You know, nobody's knocked it out in the last, you know, 2000 years, so don't feel like their burdens on you. You know, you're welcome to sort of look at everything and say, well, you want us to do child-care, you want us to do mental care, you want us to teach your children the academics, you want us to teach them about human sexuality you want me to… I mean, the list of things you're asking us to do is essentially like a laundry list of things you don't want to do. So that way you can go about and pursue different things in different ways. So yeah, Postman's book is pretty powerful on that if staying, you know, as we're not even sure whether it's to develop, you know, contributing citizens, or if it's to develop academic powerhouses, if it's about economic growth… what is it? What's the end result that school supposed to have? And how could we think about it differently? So those are two of my favorites.

Kiera 50:26
Thank you. Okay. And then. So, I will say, is there anything that you would like me to omit from the interview that you said that you don't want, other than the names and such?

Jean-Paul 50:41
Oh, no, I'm fine. I get interviewed enough that everything I've said here is somewhere on the pope public social sphere.

Kiera 50:53
Right. Okay. And then I'm just going to inform you that the interview will be transcribed and the audio and audio-visual recording will be deleted immediately after the transcription is created. And the research collected for this study will not be used for any purpose besides the senior thesis.

Jean-Paul 51:08
Very good.

Kiera 51:10
Awesome. I'll stop recording now.

*Recordings Ends.*

**MADDEN**

*Recording Begins.*

Kiera 0:00
All right, so do I have your consent record this interview? Yeah. Okay. And then, what were you going to say?

Madden 0:11
Oh, how many folks are you interviewing?

Kiera 0:14
Um, I think you're my eighth person, and I'm probably going to get to like 10. I'm just loving this I just like I've finessed this into being something I'm really enjoying so it's been really fun. Yeah, but so okay so we're just gonna start with some preliminary questions, and then I'll do some background teaching questions, and then we'll go to the main teaching questions. So that's how it's gonna be laid out. So, would you like me to use an actual pseudonym for you, when I refer to you throughout the interview?

Madden 1:04
No, you don’t have to.

Kiera 1:06
Okay. And then if you're comfortable sharing, could you share your gender identity, how you identify racially and whether you'd consider yourself a young adult, middle-aged adult, or a senior?

Madden 1:20
Alright, so I guess I would say middle-aged.
Kiera 1:26
Okay. And then, are you comfortable sharing your gender identity and how you identify racially?

Madden 1:33
Yes. So, male and white.

Kiera 1:37
Okay. And then, awesome. Okay, and then what is your educational background so where did you get your bachelor's degree and where did you get your teaching credential?

Madden 1:48
Yeah, so I got my bachelor's from the University of Maine. And then I got my master's degree from the University of Rhode Island, and that's where I got all of my teaching credentials.

Kiera 2:03
Awesome, which subject do you teach in high school?

Madden 2:09
So now I'm teaching history classes.

Kiera 2:15
And then how long have you been teaching at the high school level?

Madden 2:21
More than 30 years.

Kiera 2:24
And then, what inspired you to be a teacher. So, did you have any mentors that heavily influenced your journey to education?

Madden 2:32
I think when I was actually a really young kid, when I was like eight or nine or ten or something like that, I thought it would be really fun to just to be like a gym teacher. But I always had that sort of in my mind in terms of doing and working with kids but growing up in sort of a business-oriented family. Even though, I probably should have gone into education right away, when I first started studying in college, I studied like business… Business and Economics.

Kiera 3:08
Yeah. Perfect, thank you. Okay, so now we'll do the main teaching questions. So, do you try to inspire critical thinking within your students and how, and so would you say that you have a current teaching style or pedagogy and what would that be?

Madden 3:26
Um, well, yeah, I'm fortunate to work in an independent school where I can basically use a huge array of material and sources to kind of stimulate the kids. So, for instance, we might read up,
you know, we might look at a variety of historical documents from in the past but also using, you
know, recent materials so that the kids feel like they have, they're staying current with what's
going on today and we don't have to just use textbooks. I mean, we just use a ton of different
materials, whether it can be anything from a graphic novel, or a biography, or a variety of other
texts and primary source documents.

Kiera 4:27
Okay. So how much of ‘you’ do you display to your students, or in other words how much are
you authentically yourself while teaching and interacting with them, and do you grapple with
wearing your ‘teaching hat’ versus your ‘Scott hat’ and where do you draw that line?

Madden 4:48
I would say pretty much like 95% I would be the real person.

Kiera 4:59
So, what is that 5% that you feel like you're like… like where did the students push that line,
where do you draw it?

Madden 5:08
Oh, I would just say in terms of, if there's anything that related to say, alcohol, drugs, things like
that… something that you probably should not bring up. Or certain personal things with, whether
it's related to, you know your own children or your own family and things like that, that there are
certain things, you know, that probably just should not be addressed.

Kiera 5:39
And so, like going off about so what are like the social norms within your classroom and how do
you influence those norms, and like the… I know social norms are not the same across different
classrooms but like how do you influence them and how do you what do you want your
classroom to look like I guess?

Madden 6:03
In terms of discussion or in terms of kids feeling comfortable or…

Kiera 6:11
I mean I guess both like, I just, yeah, like in terms of how you're teaching the actual material and
in terms of how you're making your students feeling and all these things.

Madden 6:24
I mean, I think, I mean it's certainly the school that I work at we try to be very inclusive. And,
you know to make the students as comfortable as possible, even though we might be teaching
some challenging curriculum, in terms of the subject matter, is that students, we want them to
feel free to express their emotions or thoughts, if they feel uncomfortable with certain subjects,
then they should bring it up and we don't necessarily have to talk about those issues all the time.
So, what role does discipline play within your teaching style and how do you engage with both the assumed and real power that you hold as authority figure within the classroom?

Madden 7:23
I've never been a huge fan of discipline sort of stuff. So, I basically try to make it out of a mutual respect environment. And so, I always viewed teaching as basically, you’re not really there for your paycheck per se, although that's fine, but you're really there to improve the students’ lives, and to make a difference with them. So, I think the students get it for the most part, I mean very rarely do we have discipline problems. And basically, it's the respect, and I'm not even so much looking for my respect, I'm looking for the respect of all of the students who are in the classroom. So, if the kids who are asked to leave the room or would have to be would have to face some sort of disciplinary type situation, would always be the kids who just are not being respectful of the whole school environment.

Kiera 8:34
So how do you sit on like, let's say like the first day of school or whatever, do you like, come up with this like okay this is what we're going to do, or is it just kind of like well once something happens that you feel like broke that respect, then that's when you address it or how do you implement that?

Madden 8:52
I mean I think it depends if you're starting your first year of teaching or your 10th year or your 30th year, it's definitely very different. So, when I was first teaching, I still would not go into the classroom being like a real strong disciplinary person, I still basically would use that mutual respect model, and just try to emphasize a community-oriented classroom where, I mean, obviously certain things in terms of whether it's appropriate language related to race or sexual identity and things like that. Or, you know, in some sort of negative atmosphere in the classroom where kids don't feel comfortable then that's pretty much the line where that's the behavior line that would be drawn.

Kiera 9:51
And then you kind of touched on this from the very beginning about like getting past and current materials for the students to read and stuff, but are there any other… the question is do you connect lessons to the real world and student experiences and how? So, there are other strategies you have to do that?

Madden 10:14
Yeah, and I think it depends on what school you're at, but I can see you can certainly use I mean in the Washington DC area, you can use, you know, going out and do like experiential education stuff and actually go out and interview other people, or go visit, you know, historical sites or bringing people into the classroom. As well as, I mean, it's so much easier these days of course to use online materials in many ways so for instance we might look at, you know, The Los Angeles Times, or, you know, the Chicago Tribune or something, or Washington Post and take a look about what's happening in real time. Or we might watch some sort of documentary or video and stuff like that to give them a much stronger sense of what's happening right now.
Kiera 11:11
And then, this is kind of a weird question, but how do you measure something that is measurable, such as your ability to influence your students? So, how do you reflect on your own ‘success’ as a teacher?

Madden 11:30
I would say, well, the feedback that students give you in and out of the classroom, but also over the years that you've been teaching, you would get feedback from the students, as well as from parents, and I think from your peers too and from other teachers.

Kiera 11:54
Okay, and then it's also kind of a big one but, what are the key differences for you between a good day teaching and a bad day teaching, like what are the distinguishing factors?

Madden 12:11
Well, I pretty much almost always optimistic and pretty positive. I don't know if it's somewhat of genetics too, so, almost feel like the only time that I ever have negatives, let’s say at school, when it might be one student who might have caused some sort of disruption that classroom had to be altered for, whether it was, you know, a minute or 10 minutes or something like that because you might have had to remove that student because of some sort of behavior issue, which is, you know, which is very rare. Or if you had some sort of lesson that made a student feel extremely uncomfortable, and that they might have had to leave the room, or, you know, I mean it happens very rarely, or you might get a message from a parent or something being like, oh my son or daughter was very upset by such and such.

Kiera 13:26
So, the question is, what have been some of the most difficult experiences as a teacher and why, and what are the most rewarding things about teaching?

Madden 13:37
I really like to do a lot. I've been fortunate and been able to take students on a lot of out of classroom experiences. And so, whether it's traveling like on a Civil Rights trip to the South or taking kids on like a civil war multi-day program or something. So, I think it's, for me, I really like traveling with students too, so I've gone to Cuba with kids and Japan, and things like that. So those out of classroom things have been fantastic. And at the same time, it's always fun to hear the students when they either do some sort of research on their own and are able to present it to their peers and feel like they have actually gone above and beyond a little bit and learned a little bit of extra and they can actually become, you know, somewhat of a mini expert on something. Or to just have students which has happened, you know, just give them the opportunity to be like, “Oh, here's this book,” this would be, you know, we're not we're not have time to go over this whole book in class but I'm happy to just give you this book and you can bring it back at some point or maybe not, and just read it for your own pure enjoyment and try to take whatever you can from it.

Kiera 15:05
Okay. And then on the flip side, have you experienced burnout and what are some strategies you may use to mitigate that burnout?

Madden 15:19
I think the biggest thing is that teachers have to just like take care of themselves. They have to do self-care, and exercise and, you know, find space for themselves and have their children sleep, and, yeah, no I just think that they just should maybe do some summer programs or different things that the keep them always engaged like I used to do a bunch of Smithsonian summer programs, or anything that you can do to kind of take yourself out of the traditional setting.

Kiera 16:00
Thank you. Okay, well, let's see, so I created this word, or I think I created this word, called inspiragination to describe an experience I had, the professor back at my old school for sociology 101 because he just like flipped my world upside down and I could not think of a word that described what he sparked inside of me. I was like, holy crap, like I want to do that. I want to do that other people. So, I guess I'm just asking my interviewees like without me giving, I mean, it's obviously combining inspire and imagination, but what would you off the top of your head say that that word means?

Madden 17:04
I would just say that, for me, it'd be like having a student be so excited about certain subjects that they would be willing to just jump into a new area of learning that they really maybe had not anticipated thinking about prior to that. So, what did you say? Inspired imagination?

Kiera 17:35
Yeah, it's just combining the words inspire and imagination.

Madden 17:40
Right. I think it can happen in many ways, it can happen in subject material, or like right now I'm trying to plan, I mean I've already planned it, we're just trying to get the kids to go on this four day biking trip from Pittsburgh to Cumberland, Maryland on this rail to trail network for a four day trip in the last week in April and, you know, just trying to get them inspired to be like, “Oh, I don’t think I can really bike 150 miles,” but I'm like, “Yeah, no it's over four days of course you can do it, my 10 year old did it.” And, and to and to be like, think outside of their, you know, smaller confines.

Kiera 18:24
Okay, I like that. Okay, and then we’re basically wrapping it up here but is there anything that you wanted to share, it's okay if not, but I just wanted to create a space if there's anything you wanted to say, like ‘oh, there wasn't a question that sparked what I was thinking,’ but there's no pressure if there's nothing.

Madden 18:45
I think that, I mean I just think people who, who are interested in teaching, you know, I always thought that enthusiasm and patience - I used to have an acronym, I'm sure if I could think about it – but it's basically like enthusiasm and patience would be the two things, because as long as
you're patient, and you bring enough energy to the classroom, I think you can pretty much do whatever. And then, of course, being compassionate to understand, you know, people come from a lot of different angles, and you have no idea really what's happened in people's lives. So, always be willing to, you know, embrace new challenges with students. I certainly think my goal every day is just to bring, not only the students to bring the energy and stuff like that, it's really the teachers, they have to be the people who inspire the kids, and to make, you know, and to make that sort of difference. So, yeah.

Kiera 20:02
Thank you. And then finally I'm just asking everyone if they had either, or both, a fun book or a book that heavily influenced you because I'm going to create like a little book list at the end, just for fun. So, if there's a book that you're like, “oh this like changed my life.” Then I would just totally want to hear about it. If you can't think off the top of your head that's okay too because you could just email me if you think about it.

Madden 20:33
Right, so I would think, I mean I just read this book that I'm using in my class that came out in 2010 called The Warmth of Other Suns.

Kiera 20:56
Oh yeah. Who's that by?

Madden 20:59
By Isabel Wilkerson.

Kiera 21:01
Oh, she also wrote Caste.

Madden 21:05
It's her book that came out before that.

Kiera 21:07
I just bought that other one.

Madden 21:09
Yeah, I just used a few chapters from Caste for my class the other day. So that's the thing like, at my school, you can just, I mean, I just buy the book and be like alright I'm gonna do this or whatever. No, there's like, in terms of like early on when I worked for Outward Bound, you know, early I was reading some books about like you know Outward Bound in terms of, like, those sorts of venture experiential sort of things like that. But, oh well, the one book, definitely, which I had when I was first reading as an undergraduate, A People's History of the United States. Because, you know when I certainly did not have that book in high school, and when I read it, I was like, “Oh, wow. Okay.” So, there's a lot more things that of course never been taught.

Kiera 22:13
Right, yeah. Awesome. Hey, well, thank you. I also want to say that this interview is going to be transcribed and the audio and audio-visual will be deleted immediately after the transcription is created. And the research collected for the study will not be used for any purpose besides the senior thesis. Alright! I'm going to stop the recording now.

*Recording Ends.*

**UITVLUGT**

*Recording Begins.*

Kiera 0:02
Okay, so now I just started recording. So, do I have your consent to record this interview?

Uitvlugt 0:06
You have my consent to record.

Kiera 0:08
Awesome. Okay, so would you like me to use a pseudonym to refer to you?

Uitvlugt 0:15
I don't think that's necessary. My real name is fine.

Kiera 0:21
Okay, and then if comfortable, could you share your gender identity and pronouns, and how you identify racially, and whether you consider yourself a young adult, middle aged, or senior?

Uitvlugt 0:34
Sure. So, I gender identify as male. So, I use he/him/his pronouns. And I identify as white, and age… I'm 40. So, I don't know, what does that mean… I'm middle aged, I guess.

Kiera 1:01
Perfect. And then I'll just go to that some background teaching questions, and then we'll get to the main ones. So, what is your educational background? So where did you get your bachelor's degree and where did you get your teaching credential?

Uitvlugt 1:13
Sure. So, I did my bachelor's degree at Lake Superior State University in Michigan, and I did a Natural Resources and Parks and Recreation Management degree, and that was my bachelor's. And then I went to University of Washington to do my Master's in teaching, that was my teaching certification program there.

Kiera 1:39
Awesome. And then what subject do you teach in high school? And how long have you been teaching at the high school level?
Uitvlugt 1:44
Yeah. So currently, I teach AP Environmental Science, and I've been teaching that for the I think this is my 11th year, which is a little hard to believe, but and yeah, so and that's also the number of years that I've been teaching at the high school level.

Kiera 2:06
Okay, and then what inspired you to be a teacher? Did you have any mentors that heavily influenced your journey to education?

Uitvlugt 2:17
Hmm, I think looking back on it, I had a teacher in high school that I don't think, at the time, like I didn't go to my undergrad to like become a teacher. I did that kind of after the fact. So, I did my undergrad, and then I did Peace Corps, and then I actually was teaching in an environmental learning center, and I think that's really what kind of sparked my desire to become a teacher. I was working with elementary age students who would come, and we would do environmental education with them. So, I wasn't a classroom teacher, but I think that really kind of got the idea in my head that, oh, yeah, I could be a teacher. But looking back, I had a teacher in high school that I kind of now, you know, realize that I kind of modeled myself off of, he's very focused on you know, student relationships, and you know, just kind of making content real for students and applicable and really focused in on, you know, why we're learning and not just, you know, what's learned. But really like how, you know, real life is kind of, the classroom is real life, you can be doing valuable things in the classroom, and it's not just like, Oh, yeah, once you are in the real world, you'll do stuff. So yeah, I think looking back, I kind of took a little bit of a roundabout path to get to actually be in the classroom and teaching.

Kiera 4:16
Thank you. So that connects to a different question because one of my questions is, do you connect lessons to the real world and student experiences? So, you mentioned that that person influenced you, but do you have your own strategies in like, how you do that?

Uitvlugt 4:34
Yeah. It's definitely I mean, at the forefront of my mind, I'd say, you know, every day and luckily, I teach environmental science, you know, it's so prevalent in people's lives. You know, whether people are hearing the news, there's always stories about climate change, or, you know, weather events or yeah. It could be just the weather outside your door, you know, it's a very, like real subject already for students. And I think I'm lucky in that because then I can take, you know, the content and really say, okay, well here are, you know, here's, here's why that's happening, why this weather is happening or why, you know, this is in the news right now or, you know why climate change is such an issue and why people keep talking about it, and why it gets involved in politics and things. So again, I think I'm lucky in that it's a subject that people have a lot of background information on whether they know, you know, the science behind it or not. That's where I get to step in and kind of say, Oh, yeah, hey, you know, there's this, but let's talk about, you know, the reality of it in the ‘how’s’ and ‘why’s’ and then the implications for it. So yeah, I think that students kind of come in with a little bit of prior knowledge, but then we get to build on it and kind of solidify that, you know, take something that they've been wondering about, or heard about, in kind of actually talk through it, which is pretty nice.
Kiera 6:21
Yeah. Awesome. And then this is a different question, but you kind of inspired this question for me to ask other people it because I remember you literally going like, “I want to take off my teaching hat for a second,” so you're inspiring this question, but how much of 'you’ do you display to your students? Or in other words, how much are you authentically yourself while teaching? And do you grapple with wearing your “teaching hat” and your “Jason hat?”

Uitvlugt 6:51
Yeah. Yeah, and I still do that, because I feel like, sometimes it's important, you know, to kind of step aside from the content, you know, and being a science teacher, we're trying to deal with the facts, and really not showing a bias, but at the same time, we all know, we're humans, and so we know that there is implicit bias, and there's bias, just through, you can take climate change, you know, there's just, it's just so heavily loaded, and it gets political and all these things, but I definitely, want to keep that teacher hat on and talk about the facts and get the content out. But I think it's also important, and it kind of goes I think, kind of back to the last question to, you know, helping students connect to material by showing that, you know, I have a personal connection, you know, that this is, hey, this is Jason, you know, talking about this, and I personally care about this, for these, scientific and factual reasons. But, you know, here's how this maybe kind of plays out in my personal life with, you know, like, my food choices, or, you know, family choices, yeah. But I think you're going to probably get a very different answer for this question with all different teachers. We're different people, you know, and some teachers - maybe they don't have different hats. You know, they're, they don't, they don't take that hat on or off. And it's just like, they're just themselves, and that's just who they are, and that's just how it comes out teaching. I almost think of it, like almost kind of like step on a stage. You know, when you're teaching because you know, it especially with lecture, I lecture a lot like it, it's not like at home, I'm lecturing. I don't talk like this at home, where I'm just like, you know, oh, hey, kids, you know, I got two little kids like, hey, you know, we’re talking about photosynthesis today… Talking to high school students, you know, I want to be professional. Right. And so, I'm definitely gonna wear that teacher hat. But I also want to them to see, you know, the fact that I am a person involved in all of this just like they are, you know, I mean, that's really kind of the bottom line for me is teaching and especially teaching environmental science that, you know, they're all involved in it, you know, and I think sometimes taking that teacher hat off and making it more personal, can be a really valuable thing. I think the tricky part in the balance really is, you know, I'm not like, like buddies, you know, with my students, you know, it's not like we're friends. And I think student relationships are important, but I don't think it's, you know, it's still a teacher student relationship, I'm not trying to be friends with students but you know, I can be human with students. I think personally, that’s a pretty important thing to teaching is, showing that humanity while you're trying to talk about, the content as well.

Kiera 10:43
So awesome, thank you. Okay, and then the main question is do you try to inspire critical thinking within your students, and would you say you have a current teaching style or pedagogy and has that changed since you first started?

Uitvlugt 11:07
Yeah, that's a great question. Because I think critical thinking is so core, you know, it is just so necessary for, you know, not just myself, I think it's just, it's a human struggle, you know, we all kind of grapple with critical thinking, I think, especially now, with social media, I mean, social media, I think really encourages kind of the lack of critical thinking, like, it's just, you know, it's just so easy to get information, whether that information is accurate, or not, you know, and then it's just so easy to share. I think you can apply that to my subject with, with environmental science, it's really easy to stray down that path of environmentalism, and I think sometimes when I take my teacher hat off, and I put my Jason hat on, I'm sounding more like an environmentalist. You know, somebody who's passionate about environmental concerns, more than maybe environmental science, who's kind of looking at things objectively, and here are the facts. So, you know, I think, yeah, in some ways, it's really easy to kind of, like sensationalize things, and in, you know, just like, you know, headlines, and like, Oh, you know, X number of people are going to be affected by climate change, or x number of species are going to be extinct by, you know, the year 20-whatever. But, then there's so much that's just so much deeper, you know, and I don't think that personally, I don't think that guilt really works with environmental science, you know, making people feel guilty for their personal choices. So much of it is beyond, you know, our personal decisions, it's systemic problems with environmental science. I mean, global climate change is not happening, because I drove to work today, you know, and I use gas to do that, you know, it's, because the infrastructure is there for me, to drive my vehicle and that's the easiest way for me to get here, and that's not my fault. I mean, that's a that's a problem with the system here. And so being able to think critically, and look back at a problem, look at a headline, through the lens. My goal is really, you know, informing students about the facts, like what are the facts, and then, you know, the problems are big and immense. We're not going to solve them sitting here in class. So that's not what critical thinking is about. You know, the end game is like, okay, by the, you know, by 12:30, we got to have a solution for global climate change, you know, it's okay, what are the facts? What is really happening here? And, and, you know, think through it, and then maybe there are places where you can make a personal choice and changes and things and maybe make an influence on the big picture, but also understanding like the systems that are in place. Yeah. So, it's not easy. And I think critical thinking is a process that has evolved for me as well. it's, how do I, as a teacher, try to encourage it in students, I think it's over the last at least a few years… I go back to social media, it does seem like a different wave of kind of information, and whether it's, you know, good information or not, thinking about that, you know, if I see this post, and, it could just be something as kind of, you know, as mundane as like a rumor about somebody, you're like, oh, wow, like, ‘who knew that they were that way’ or whatever. But like, hey, how about you just actually ask them? Like, is that true? Like, fact checking, you know. I think we can do that in my class as well, just encourage students to always go back to the facts, you know, and yes, you can have personal opinions about those facts. And, yeah, you might become passionate about those facts. But without the facts, you don't really have much to stand on. So, to me, I think that's kind of how I approach critical thinking is really just encouraging students to make sure they're dealing with facts, and if they aren't, figure out ways to find out, you know, and address those facts. Before they go down a path that, you know, it's not, you're not dealing with facts anymore, because that happens. I think it happens with politics, and, you know, just all over the place. But yeah, I feel like I'm kind of rambling at this point. I'm not sure if I answered the question. But that's a that's a tough one. I mean, critical thing is just so important, it’s something that is not like a formula. Like, ‘here's how you think critically…’
Kiera 17:13
Right. That's why it's cool to get so many different perspectives. So, I guess the whole idea around like facts and stuff is reminding me, like, it's interesting, because I'm thinking of it now in two ways where it's like, because on the other side of it, I'm thinking, if I'm just told facts, then it in a way it's kind of... I could see it also mitigating me from thinking critically because I'm like, that's the truth, and that there's no other way to think about it. But at the same time, what you're saying is like, but if you don't think critically, then you're never going to try to even question something that you're being told is a fact, when it’s not.

Uitvlugt 18:10
Right.

Kiera 18:11
Especially in science.

Uitvlugt 18:13
Right, right. Yeah. Yeah, that's a great way to think about it. I think some people kind of get into the mentality, that critical thinking is, means that you're going to get to like the best answer, you know, and I don't know if it is that. I think it's exactly what you just said, it's just questioning, and continuing to question. And I think that's what a lot of people don't realize about science, even people that have been in science have been through science classes their whole lives. I mean, I can see it right now with the global pandemic that’s happening, that people don't, like, really understand the scientific process. The scientific process is not really about giving us answers. You know, when are we all going to be back in school in person? You know, that's not science. Science is, “Well, we'll see.” Things are changing, and guess what, science changes. You know, science is not set in stone. And, you know, there's, you know, a few laws, you know, there's the laws of, you know, Newton's laws and, you know, the laws of thermodynamics, and, you know, the law of conservation of matter, and, you know, gravity is going to affect us on this planet. But mostly in science, it's, hey, here's what we've seen before, you know, how's it going to apply to this situation, and adapting to those situations. So, I think critical thinking is, you know, having facts at your disposal to question, and not necessarily as a means to an end. To me, it’s not about like, getting to an end and final point. It’s not like, “Okay, well, here's all the facts so I guess I'm done thinking.” Taking the teacher hat off and the Jason hat on… going back to that’s part of the reason why I do that, you know, okay, here are the facts, and here's a little bit about how I feel about it, you know, and I don't want to sway your critical thinking and saying, Well, you know, Uitvlugt feels that way so I guess I should too. But, you know, I want to humanize it at the same time, and here's how I've thought critically about this. So, I think sometimes critical thinking is, is, you know, it's a modeling. You know, it's, so maybe that's a strategy, going back to that question, but just trying to show critical thinking, you know, and talking about my experiences. I mean, yeah, I'm old, but like, you know, I can still remember High School. So, you know, how did I think or feel about this and how is my own kind of thought process evolved in, you know, whatever situation it is, as well. You know, I think that's the capacity to change and realizing that, you know, learning isn't like, you know… I mean, you're in college right now. And, you know, guess what, I hate to break it to you, but you're not going to graduate college and know it all, you know, it's just not how it is. But I think sometimes we are like kind of brought up thinking that like, Oh, well that that person went to college so
they're smart. No, that's not necessarily true, you know, maybe they just paid a bunch of money and partied the whole time. And then they barely passed their classes and didn't actually learn anything, and now they're doing something totally different that doesn't relate to what they did in college at all. That piece of paper doesn't, you know, signify critical thinking or learning or, you know, maybe much at all, I'm afraid. But, you know, it's a step in the process. And hopefully we can all, as a species, just keep going on that process. I like how you phrased that question earlier, like, what, you know, recently or, like, you know, what are the strategies you've used and how maybe has that changed? You know, I hope that I'm changing things as a teacher, as I learn as well, you know, right. I mean, this year is just so wacky, you know, like, I've never done online teaching before, you know, so I had to change and adapt. I think being proactive and reactive and just kind of responding to the facts, again, you know, the fact is, we can't be in person for teaching, or at least earlier in the year we weren't, so it's like, okay, so what are we going to do? How are we going to make this work? So, yeah. Is it perfect? Again, did we reach the final, perfect answer? No. And I told students this all year through all of this wackiness of this year is, “Hey, guess what? There's no perfect form of learning. You might not like online learning, but guess what? Not everybody likes being in the classroom either.” So like, there's just no perfect way to do it. You know, I don't think critical thinking again, is about like finding that perfect answer.

*Kiera’s Wi-Fi goes out for a few minutes, then recording begins again.*

Kiera 0:43
Okay, thanks for being flexible.

Uitvlugt 0:48
Yeah, yeah, you got it.

Kiera 0:52
Okay, well, we'll just keep chugging along. So, what role does discipline play in your teaching style? Or how do you engage with the assumed and real power you hold as an authority figure within the classroom?

Uitvlugt 1:14
Wow. Yeah. That's a good question. My goal is to set up expectations as early as possible. I work with juniors and seniors, so I think for the most part, you know, they kind of get classroom expectations. I think trying to set up expectations, like this is how I'm going to be and how I'd like you to be. And kind of going from, you know, just the, hopefully a feeling of mutual respect. And I think, like you said, I think that's an important thing, you know, that, that kind of implied power… I think in general, you know, students see the teacher as kind of the one in control. But, you know, I also don't want to be abusive of that. So, I try to treat students as respectfully as possible, treating them like people, and then in the hopes that you get treated like a person back. And I think, you know, generally, that works. If there's a student, I don't know, that’s using their phone or something, I mean, students are pretty good at hiding that one, and honestly, you know, it's like, okay, they're obviously a little distracted, maybe I just need to take a break. And maybe we all just need a little bit of a break. Or, sometimes my mentality is, maybe that just is more important to them right now to be texting their friend quick or whatever. You know, if it's
excessive, I try to talk to the student, you know, out of class about it or shoot them an email, you
know, like, hey, you're obviously distracted. And it I guess, when, you know, when it becomes
an issue to me is if it's distracting other students. We've all got a million things going on. So, you
know, for a student to not be 100% on point, like, Okay, I'm writing notes down frantically,
you're tracking me, but we're all going to be a little bit distracted or tired or whatever. Maybe
this isn't our subject or chapter that we're interested in. But yeah, again, just try to be respectful
and treating students like the people that they are, and that they, you know, reciprocate that that
respect back.

Kiera 4:25
Perfect. So, and then how do you measure something that is somewhat measurable, such as your
ability to influence your students and how do you measure your own success in that department?

Uitvlugt 4:49
Yeah, that is a tough one. How do I measure that? I mean, it's mostly, to me, at least I think
probably like, anecdotal, you know, obviously, there's like, okay, are students paying attention,
they should do well on any quizzes or tests or something that I give to them. Or if I give him an
assignment, they should, you know, respond by giving me the responses I'm kind of looking for.
So, I think there's that, but it also goes beyond that. If a student is bringing up an example where
they're like, “Hey, you know, I thought about this before,” or “my parents and I were talking
about this,” or, you know, “my uncle told me this,” if they're engaging to that point, to me, it puts
it in a different level. As far as kind of the academic learning side, where it really shows they're
taking what we're talking about and learning about and they're thinking about it in their own, you
know, real situations. To me, that's a, that's a measurement of success. But I think too, students
that ask, personal questions too, I mean, I think that is an important thing about kind of that
teacher student relationship, you know, like, “Hey, how are your kids doing?” Or, you know,
“How are you feeling about this going back to in-person thing?” I think in some ways that shows
success for me, and that a strategy that I use to try to… whether it's influence students or… what
I try to do is create relationships. Again, obviously, like appropriate student-teacher
relationships, but like, it doesn't mean that, you know, I'm not human, and they're not human. So,
you know, talk about sports, or whatever, or college and you're still, you know, in
communication with me and want to interview me, you know, to me, that's, you know, to me,
this is a sign of success, you know, like, we had a positive relationship and, you know, hopefully
you learned some of the content, but also critical thinking and how to be a good person, and all
these other kind of, like, you know, intangible, not in the curriculum, sort of things that I think,
you know, teaching can be. I think making those connections beyond the classroom, again, I
think it really just kind of comes back to that.

Kiera 7:44
All right. And I think that also connects to your involvement with the 501(c)(3) too. That's like,
obviously not one of my questions, but connecting that to like, that's more tangible, and how
you're connecting that to how you get students involved in that way?

Uitvlugt 8:13
Right. Absolutely. Absolutely. You know, and that's, you know, that's kind of like, next level and
like far outside the classroom, you know, giving students who are interested a really amazing
way to engage with the subjects that they care about. So, yeah, that's kind of next level, but it's not like I can't you know, take those experiences and bring them back to the classroom and share those experiences in the classroom as well.

Kiera 8:57
Perfect, okay. And then what would you say are the most rewarding things about teaching for you?

Uitvlugt 9:06
Oh, boy. I mean, to me it's, I mean, the fact that I get to go to work every day, and talk about stuff that I care about, you know, I mean, for me, it's a passion and to be able to, you know, my passion is environmental science and, you know, the natural world that we all live in and experience. So, you know, I get to spend every day sharing that with people, and I get paid for it, you know, so it's like, hey, that's a pretty good deal. But also, you know, again, out of 150 students, it's not like you know even half of them. I don't even wouldn't even have a number but it's not like, I have students that are all, like all going on in environmental science as a major or anything like that, or as a career path. But, you know, I think, really environmental science is not just that I, it's this planet, you know, it's this thing that we all experience, and it's really rewarding for me to hear students and seeing students, kind of making, you know, making connections to, “oh that's why, you know, people talk about that.” You know, global climate change, as much as it gets politicized, very few people really understand, like, at its core, like, what it is and why it's an issue and why it's gonna affect our species and all other species on this planet. So, you know, just getting students to that point where like, “okay, you know, yeah, this isn't like, my passion, but I can see someone who is passionate about it, and I can learn from them.” It’s not like, “Oh, yeah, that's what I get to go on and do in college.” But like, “Oh, I'm a human who lives on planet Earth, and this is the only planet we have, and, gosh, it seems like we should be kind of thoughtful about that.”

Kiera 11:33
Okay, perfect. So, and then, have you experienced burnout and what are your strategies to mitigate that? So, I could leave it at that, but like, what keeps you going when you're like, “Oh, my gosh, this was like, the worst day ever?”

Uitvlugt 11:50
Yeah. I mean with me that definitely happened. And I think this year is, you know, this year is unique in that we're being asked to do a lot of different things… we’re asked to teach in different formats. But yeah, I'm grateful for the breaks in the schedule, you know, winter break and spring break coming up. I definitely use those to recharge, I use my weekends. My strategy to avoid stress or burnout is to, as much as possible, leave my schoolwork at school. That is not always possible. And sometimes I'm grading at home and stuff, but I've really tried to arrange and structure my class so that I'm doing it in class, you know, and obviously, there's always going to be grading and stuff that I can't do, you know, while students are in here and things like that. But, you know, on my weekend, I don't want to be doing school stuff, you know, I want to be hanging out with my family. And, you know, I then it's like, I'm not wearing my teacher hat on the weekend, you know, that's, that's all Jason I'm doing just stuff for me and my family, you know, I'm working in my garden or, you know, playing outside with my kids, or, you know, doing
whatever they want to do. So that, you know, my batteries get charged up, so that I'm not coming to school, just burned out and just tired. I think if, you know, you're not taking care of yourself as a teacher, you know, it's really hard to take care of your students, even in the most basic ways of just like, getting some information out there for them. So, let alone like, you know, caring about them as people… I think it's pretty essential to really take care of yourself. And so, yeah, using those breaks, you know, using earlier we were talking about, you know, taking trips with Mr. Lewis, you know, having extensions that, you know, obviously still relate to my classroom and my passions and my topic, but that also are just good for me, you know. I love going to Africa, you know, I miss it and think about it, and it's something that's, you know, really good for me, but it also happens to be good for my students in a lot of ways too.

Kiera 14:45
Okay, so we're almost done. But so, I created this word, *inspiragination*, which is combining, inspire and imagination together to describe an experience I had with a professor my first year, and I was just wondering if - there's no wrong answers - just off the top of your head what that word like would mean in your teaching context?

Uitvlugt 15:14
Yeah. I think, *inspiragination*, for me, it would be like knowing or hearing from a student or you know, even not hearing or knowing it, but like hoping that wherever students end up like whatever major, you know, whatever field of, you know, study or life, or wherever they end up that thing that came up in my class, whether I said it or not, you know, is, is coming back to them. You learn how to learn in college, and you kind of learn more about who you are and how you want to operate in this world. But like, that doesn't stop. So, like, maybe, you know, talking about climate change, or, you know, waste management and how it relates to recycling, or, you know, maybe that's not gonna hit, and I won't even say maybe, I mean, definite that it’s not going to hit every student in the same place at the same time, and they're going to walk away, just being inspired, and, you know, come up with all these ideas and how to solve these problems and stuff. But, you know, if down the line the seeds were planted, you know, and if it comes back to me, gosh, that'd be that'd be about as good as I could ask. Like, “Hey, you know, in Australia, we were talking about this in class 10 years ago…” I've got a former student who's working on, like, carbon capture stuff, and we actually had a zoom a couple of weeks ago, and it's like, holy cow, like you are, you're going to do it, like, you're going to save the world. You know, it's just like, stuff that's so far beyond me. But, you know, he's like, “I was sitting in your class and thinking about this.” And it's like, wow. That's inspiragination. You know, it’s planting seeds, you know, you can't expect to be inspired by the end of the school year, by the end of the class with me, but knowing that those seeds are planted and they're gonna grow into different things, because we're all different people… somewhere down the line, you know, people are making the world better because of what they learned or heard in my class. So, it's pretty cool thing to think about.

Kiera 18:13
I like that a lot. Okay, so then I’m just gonna put out a space if there was anything that you wanted to share that you didn't get a chance to discuss that I didn't have a question for, where you're like, “Oh, I wanted to say that” but if there's nothing, that's totally fine, I just wanted to provide that space if there was anything.
Um, I can't really think of anything. Yeah. Good question.

That's fine. Okay. And then lastly, I'm just creating a book list at the end for fun just so that there's this cool source of all these cool people sharing cool books. So, if you had any, like books on the top of your head that was either like a fun book or a book that heavily influenced you could share those.

Well, that's a that's a tough one. I'm just like, off the top of my head. I mean, I tried to read a lot. Probably, office have my head, it kind of put me on the spot. I might have to think about it send you email me them. The one off the top of my head. It's called the Sand County Almanac by Aldo Leopold. And, yeah, it really kind of shapes, you know, just kind of my views on the world, like the natural world. And it just kind of, you know, just like it's all about kind of like being observant and like paying attention to what's, you know, kind of going on around you. I think, I think we all just get so busy. And we have like so many other things to do that we forget that like, you know, there's so much happening, you know, weather is happening in birds. are migrating and you know, answer waking up and you know, doing their thing and it's, there's so much going on. That's like, so real, you know, and we just kind of are trained in so many ways to ignore it. Yeah, so I think that's probably one that yeah, I mean if you're, if you're looking for like, like the book I probably put that out there. You know if it's just like pawn books I'd say Harry Potter because, you know, yeah, you know? Yeah,

perfect. Well, that's awesome if you that's perfectly good enough but if anything else comes to your head, you don't you can email me or whatever. Cool. Well, this interview is going to be transcribed and the audio and audio-visual will be deleted immediately after the transcription is created. And the research collected for the study will not be used for any purpose besides the senior thesis. Okay, well I'm going to stop recording.

Recording Ends.

Katie 0:01
Okay, so do I have your consent to record this interview.

Katie 0:04
Yes.

Kiera 0:05
Okay, awesome. Okay, and would you like me to use a pseudonym to refer to you or are you okay with me using your real name?
Katie 0:20
I think that's fine. Call me Katie, that's fine.

Kiera 0:28
Okay. And then if you're comfortable sharing, what is your gender identity and pronouns, how you identify racially and ethnically, and whether you would consider yourself a young-adult, middle-aged adult, or a senior?

Katie 0:36
Okay, I am a white female, and I just turned 51, so I think that makes me middle aged, I think I'm middle aged.

Kiera 0:57
Okay, so what is your educational background where did you get your bachelor's degree and where did you get your teaching credential?

Katie 1:11
Okay, I went to Lewis and Clark in Portland and I got a bachelor's degree in history, and I graduated in 1991 which doesn't seem that far away, but it actually is like super far away. And then I went to the University of Colorado at Boulder and did a master's degree in education there.

Kiera 1:36
And then, what subject do you teach in high school and how long have you been teaching at the high school level?

Katie 1:45
I teach social studies, and I've taught for… I feel like this is my 23rd year which is crazy. And then I taught for two years before that - my first job was at a charter school in Denver, and I taught a huge variety of stuff, it was like a super alternative school and not really in departments or anything like that, so yeah.

Kiera 1:56
All right. And then, what inspired you to be a teacher? Did you have any mentors that heavily influenced you or your journey to education, or anything else like that?

Katie 2:18
Um, you know, it was, in some ways, a really practical choice. When I went to Lewis and Clark, I ended up being a history major, just out of pure love and interest I think I thought I was going to be a International Studies major or something like that but, I loved my history classes so, I became a history major and at the time, it I think there wasn't a lot of pressure in the 90s to, or the 80s to pick a major and everyone was becoming a lawyer so humanities were good. That was a good thing to do. So, yeah, I became a history major, and I took a couple years off after undergrad, and it just became clear, like I needed to find a career and I still loved history. So, it became, “Are you gonna go to grad school or are you going to become a public-school teacher?” and it just seemed practical, it was really in some ways a practical choice. But I think once I
decided to become a teacher I could kind of like, connect the dots back in my life to things that I had done where I had worked with kids. I've been a camp counselor for three years, you know, and there were a lot of choices I could see where I enjoyed working with young people and I had wanted to do a job that was sort of somewhat service oriented. And I just enjoyed the content, so it was sort of like, although it was practical, it also fit with things that I'd been interested in doing so, the decision was practical, but then I think I later was like, “This is my calling. This is a real thing.” Yeah, and then I was just lucky I went to the University of Colorado just because I happen to live in Boulder at the time, and it was a perfect match for me, and it was a two-year program, so I feel like I got to dig into education. I mean it just, it was one of those things where everything came together, they did it in a cohort. And the cohort I was with was amazing, they were so passionate, and we had a class called, I think was called “Foundations of Education” or something which is kind of I think the idea was that it was sort of a history of what is the purpose of education or something. And somehow that cohort was the perfect group of people who just got so into why we were doing what we were doing, and we had a professor who just clicked with us and we just like took over the class and we made up our own curriculum and we made it ourselves. We did this whole like out of the box thing and it was funny because the next cohort over the next year was like, “oh that Dr. C is kind of boring.” But that's a that's the truth about teaching is that there is a part of it that's just chemical; you have to have like the right people together at the right time with the right spark, you know? So that happened for me in grad school, which is great. I was lucky that I student taught with an amazing teacher I think some people talk about student teaching as sort of like being thrown in the deep end - not always a positive description of student teaching. But I taught with John Zola, who was my Master’s teacher and he was just an amazing social studies teacher, like fantastic, and also a great mentor, like he just took time and let me… He just really put effort into teaching me how to be a teacher and I realized now, you know, I didn't realize at the time but it's like I still do stuff the way that he taught me to do stuff, so it was all lucky it wasn't like I went out and sought the perfect thing but I fell into a beautiful path and it was really great. Yeah, I would give him huge credit.

Kiera 7:01
Yeah, I feel like I had a similar experience with a professor I had my first year but I mention him later, so… then for the main teaching questions. So, the main question is, do you try to inspire critical thinking or critical consciousness raising within your students and how? Or would you say you have a current teaching style or pedagogy, and what would that look like?

Katie 7:19
Sure, okay. Um, yes, I think I try to inspire critical thinking, I think that's the thing that I actually do think about a lot. I hear a lot of buzz talk about the 21st century classroom and 21st century teaching and that actually kind of bugs me because I feel like in some ways the things that we do in teaching have been true for a thousand years, they're not new; everybody wants critical thinking that's been true forever. So, yes, I think I do try to inspire critical thinking. Hmm… How do I do that… I always try to give students enough information that they can… There's like a balance like I've learned over the years. When I was younger, I would walk into a class and sort of be like, “should we have affirmative action?” Actually, affirmative action is a really good example. I remember I would ask a group of kids right, who are vast majority white upper-middle class, “Should we have affirmative action?” and then they would say stuff like, “No, we shouldn't. It's not fair.” And I would feel really like upset with their answers or like I feel like
you're not understanding a huge perspective, you know, and then later I was like, yeah, they
totally didn't understand a huge perspective, that was not a fair question that I asked them. And it
wasn't so much that I was mad at the answer that they gave me but that they didn't have enough
information to really think about the question, so I think I know over the years that I absolutely
want them to think critically, but we have to take them to a place where they have enough
information to actually be critical thinkers, because there's something that can look like an
imitation of critical thinking that's just opinion expressing. Right, well they haven't had stuff to
examine so you have to give them stuff to examine and then they can think. But, I mean, I think
critical thinking is a really - it's such a broad concept. And so, but there's no point if they don't
have some reflection piece or, I mean I want them to feel connected to the content, and to feel
connected, they have to maybe make choices and decisions about it, and to feel responsible about
it in a way, like to think now how this information, what am I going to do? And they have to
have enough information that they can make choices that are valid, that aren't just knee-jerk
opinions. So, it's not just about like - it's funny, I think we really like them to have an opinion,
but sometimes their opinion is unfounded so it might be about getting information and thinking
about the question and all sorts of stuff to know that they're really like creating ideas that are
valid.

Kiera 10:57
Yeah, and I think like what you said about them connecting it to themselves is super important.
And so like, do you do that by picking specific books or literature? Or like reflective questions or
what strategies do you use to inspire them to connect make those connections?

Katie 11:25
I think it's finding the right question. So, in humanities, we read all these texts that are amazing,
and they're all good, but I think over the years I find sort of the right questions about how they
connect it to their life. And so, in a discussion, we start, I can sort of see that we start with this
layer of like just clarification. So, the first questions are like, “what are the author's saying? What
do these terms mean? Do we understand that thesis?” So, we do that. And then we might get to
like, “Why did they say that? How did this make sense in the context that they were in? And then
we get to like, “Is this true now? Is this true for me? Is this true in my life? Could this be useful
for me in my life?” I think that's like a pattern that we do over and over. I mean, humanities is, in
some ways, easy because it's philosophy so it's all like pieces that are about how to live a good
life and how to be a good person and so it's pretty easy to go from, well this is this context, but
how would we in 2021, what's the metaphor we could use or what's the situation where that
would be at play is pretty easy to find those. But I think it's similar in history, you know, there's
the actual situation and the detailed context there, but then, okay, are there patterns here that we
can apply to 2021? I think making sure that they understand the piece and what the author says,
and then, let's make the leap to 2021. So, finding the right questions is really important, or
sometimes it's just giving them an example that's simple, and then playing with that.

Kiera 13:36
Yeah, what would you say like the physical layout of your classroom or does you know, like is it
like pods or rows or circles or like what does that look like?

Katie 13:53
Yeah, no humanities is always the same. My desks are rectangular so it's a rectangle, but it would be a big circle, and then I usually have them go to small groups for the first part and then we come into the big circle. And it's really important to ask questions that don't have a right answer, to ask questions that are not leading where you aren't asking them a question that you actually, you know… so in the clarification part you can ask them questions where you know the answer that you want, but you have to really get to a question where you're like, I actually don't know the answer to this question. You know, there is no right answer, you have to make sure that you get there, and so you have to lead them to that place. But yeah, so in my classroom it's usually a circle and then it's little circles in this big circle and then it's interesting, actually, because in other, you know, I teach, I taught well, you took Global Cit probably when you were a senior. Now we do have civics instead. It's interesting cause humanities, to me it just lends itself like that's all we do is critical thinking and discussion. A class like Global Cit is probably more, I think the way that we did it and Global Cit was to have those projects where we still gave you live questions like, the NGO project like which NGO do you think is the better one, or to come up with the criteria for what you thought made a good NGO and then you all researched and then you talked about it, or your, your research paper, your dossier right? You did your dossier, so that you knew enough. Remember, your energy project… so creating situations where, you know enough that you can actually have a real conversation and then in Global Cit. It was like we said like, you will be pro, and you will be con… I learned so much from those energy hearings actually over all these years, I learned a lot from kids. So, sometimes it's more constructed, and so in my class have used like role plays or, I mean you've been in these high school classes, like the discussions like the round table where you play the role of a country, you know, or sometimes you do fishbowl where you jump in and out, so I think sometimes you do a thing that's more constructed with students where they're playing a role. But you have to make sure that they know enough that they can have an actual opinion and understand each other's viewpoint, right? And then humanities you get to a level where they're so self-directed, that it's literally about like how to be a good person. I would say about my class in Humanities is actually the same every day, but in Global Cit or some other classes, it would be different every day, you would come in sometimes you'd be in groups sometimes you'd be, you know in rows, they sit in the front, it just changes.

Kiera 17:49
And so this is one of my questions and it kind of relates, like, the question is how much of “you” do you display to your students? Or how much are you wearing your “teaching” hat versus your “Katie” hat? Because you've mentioned some things, like well, you know. like I want to get them to this spot but you're not going to say like, “I'm doing this for you,” so like, how much are you being transparent on these different things?

Katie 18:23
I mean, politically, I would sort of say never. I think actually as a social studies teacher I've learned over the years to be very committed to, like, don't show your politics. It's never helpful to show your politics. Even though I'm sure that they infer it over time, but I wouldn't do that. In terms of, but then on the other hand I think it's interesting in humanities in terms of personally… because then we might – oh, I'm trying to think of a good example of a question that we would talk about… you know, you might talk about like, when would you serve the community? Or, when do you have to be true to yourself? Or something like that. And in those cases, I might be
very personal. I've talked about parenting, I've talked about being divorced, I've talked about, you know, teaching. I often would use a teaching example, “when a kid does this, this is a way I might respond,” because when the question is so open, it's just about you being human. It's so open that you can reveal more, I think, and not be putting people in a box, you know it, you do have a power I think as a teacher, which can be good or bad, so if I reveal my politics. Well, I've just shut down conversation people either agree with me, or they're pissed because they disagree with me, so that's an interesting piece, but if it's a question that's so open about, you know, should you be true to yourself or the community? Well, I think everybody's position is valid, and everybody's experience is different and so people can come up with scenarios, and they're like, “Oh, that's a great scenario, I've never experienced that.” So, I think I would say, authenticity, actually that's a good question because I think authenticity is really important. There are certain things that I don't show, but I found in terms of like classroom management… you've probably been in front of a room of kids but there's this time where you can have this thing that I just call the ‘out of body experience’ where for whatever reason like something's happened in the room, that's like you're watching yourself… like maybe a kid is being really obnoxious or a kid's like crying or like something's happening in the room, and you're like, “Oh, crap, what am I going to do?” But you're actually like, “and now everybody turned to page three…” You know, where sort of like there's this presentation happening, but the back of your head is like “oh my god, what am I gonna do?” And I've learned when that's happening, it's like nothing, nothing, good can occur from that. And so, I will call into the room like, “you guys I feel like you're not listening, you know, it feels like you're really not listening.” And I think and I can say sometimes like, “I think you're really tired” or “I think you didn't do the reading” or “I think you're bored” or whatever you know. I mean humanities is like an honors class so they're generally very well behaved, but I remember when I used to teach world history, sophomores, they can just get obnoxious or they can click into a pattern of like, let's just go around and have fun. And for me, it helps to have a talk with them and say, “This is what you guys are doing, you know you're not listening you're screwing around, and this is how it feels to me. You know, it feels like you don't care what I'm teaching, how can we fix this?” It helps me to bring authenticity into the room, or to say like “this terrible situation just happened right now, my brain’s not really here right now and guys, like half of my brain is in this grieving process, what do we do?” You know, I think that has been a tool that's really helped me. I also think I used to feel like when sometimes a student would talk, if I didn't understand them that I had to think I had to be like, “That's a really good answer” and now I've learned to say, “I don't understand anything you just said tell me more, explain that more, what are you thinking?” Knowing that sometimes it's actually because they understand that better than me and then sometimes it's because they don't really get it, but I think that's been important too - confidence to be really authentic and then that lets them be more authentic because they hear me say, “I don't get it.” or “what are you thinking?” Or that kind of need to be more performative, right?

Kiera 23:39
Yeah, I've had previous people I've interviewed say that they used to really care about, which I think I'll struggle with, even though I have this knowledge, like caring about the students liking them more than, like, you know, the teaching…

Katie 24:01
There's a gift of youth. There's a naturalness when you're first starting teaching. I was 25, and there's just this natural compatibility between you and the students. You're not that far apart, like the way you talk is the same. In fact, you're like ‘the cool senior’ in a way, you're just like a little bit ahead of them. And that's a gift like, it's like use that gift. When you have that gift, you use that. But at the same time, you probably do need to project a fake authority in a way because you're just like, “Shit, I don't know anything about kids… I've never done this job before.” So, there's more of that projection but then you shift as you as you lose the youthful connection then, and you have more natural authority you need to let go of the artificial stuff. They are like puppies. They read you so well, you know, if you lack confidence, they can tell, you know.

Kiera 25:18
So, like in terms of gaining, or like you mentioned like classroom management stuff, the question is, what role does discipline play in your teaching style and how do you engage with the assumed and real power that you hold as an authority figure?

Katie 25:38
Um, well okay, I would say, a) I teach at Bainbridge High School, which is a place where classroom management generally isn't a huge deal because we have a big, I think there's a community committed to education, and for whatever reason, kids think their education matters. Some of them just because they want a good resume, and some of them because they really want to learn. Generally, you know you've been there and so that's helpful to teachers. Kids will put up with I think actually really boring classes because they want to get a good grade.

Kiera 26:10
Right. I mean I think I literally took AP Lit over Humanities because it was an AP class and I fully regret that.

Katie 26:21
I know I fight that every year. I'm always like, you're gonna regret it. Okay, so, it's not a big deal at Bainbridge. But I would say it matters a lot. So, the other job that I do is academic workshop, which you probably don't even know about, maybe you know about it, but I kind of keep it on the down-low because my other job is I work with struggling students. So, I work with the non-special ed kids who are failing classes, like I literally go find who's failing the most classes and then they're in my program.

Kiera 27:41
Is it just you running that or are there multiple people?

Katie 27:44
Right now, it's just me. So, it's a cool program that basically Ms. H created that was like we have these kids who are not special ed and don't qualify for any special programming but for whatever reason they're failing all their classes. I have a big heart for those kids and partly from my alternative school days, I think. So it's funny, when you meet those kids, they are often like they are often the kids who - some of them are the kids who are just sitting in the back, not doing anything heads down on the desk, you know, and then some of them are the kids who are like, defiant or argumentative or, you know there are kids who like, you know, when you see them
when you go to your classroom, and you're like, “Oh shit, so and so's in my class.” You know, and it is interesting that I find that I mean, getting to know them is so important, so I mean I think the most important thing a teacher does is build a relationship: relationship is fundamental to everything. So, when it comes to discipline, like the first thing I do is relationship. And when a kid is being defiant, or something in class, the first thing I would work on is the relationship, like I would absolutely find a way to talk to them one on one, and maybe start by just seeing if getting to know them helps sometimes. Just asking them, “what do you like to do” or “what's your hobby?” But you know, I mean you find a way to be in their space and ask them about themselves and not be mad at them. They're probably expecting you to be mad at them and instead you're like, “what did you do this weekend?” and “Oh is that what you do? We usually do ‘blank.’” And then the next thing I would do is have a human conversation. I would talk to them one on one and say, you know, “these are the things that you do when you're in my space… you talk when I'm talking, and that makes me feel like this…” If we have a really human conversation with them then often, they'll say, “oh I can see how that feels like that” or “this is why I'm doing that” and you can usually say, “well, do you see how that feels to me and is there a different way we can do this? I'd love to talk to you one on one more” or, “I'm sorry you misinterpreted what I was saying or that I made you feel like that.” I think if you can have one on one conversation, that's always better and it also is that goal of getting to know them. I think if you know someone, you usually like them. In my workshop, yes, I meet them and it's really hard because sometimes they just get assigned to me and they don't necessarily want to meet me and often when I first meet them, I'm like, “this is such an unlikable kid.” But I know within a year, I'm just gonna love them - they're gonna be like my favorite person so I just have to say, “Wow, you're really hard to get to know but I know that I'm in love you at some point.” If you if you approach them that way. I think that's helpful. Yeah, and even in class if you think, “I'm probably misunderstanding why you're acting the way you're acting” and not take it personally - never take it personally - you're just the authority figure, and they don't know who you are so you can't get into a personal thing. Which isn't to say that I've never gotten pissed at kids or that I never, you know, come home, like you can't believe what's happened. I mean I do that, but at another level, I know that they are a beautiful human and that I'm going to love them someday, but you know, it's hard. So, I would say that the relationship is key. I'm lucky because I teach social studies so it's also easy to make not boring. I think I can usually ask good questions that are somewhat interesting to people. But anyway, but that human thing, that's what I would say.

Kiera 32:05
Yeah, I like that a lot. Yeah, it's like, I remember this the switch in my mind of like, “oh my god that's not just my teacher, that's not just my parent, like they have a whole history too. It's a weird, it's a weird thing. Um, Okay, cool. So, thank you. Um, okay. How do you measure something that is measurable, such as your ability to influence your students? Not that it needs to be measured, but how do you understand your own “success” as a teacher?

Katie 32:54
Um, that's an interesting question. I don't know that I measure it. I think when I was younger it was really important for me to know. It's funny, in some ways, that you asked the question because I think I'm a little bit - I can be a curmudgeon about what we call like formative assessment and, you know, well assessment and stuff and sort of measuring things, you know,
because I think there's so much of teaching that is immeasurable. You know there's so much that's intangible, but it's vital, it's really important, and you know that it's happening, but you can't like pinpoint it. But in some ways, you're asking me sort of a personal question like how do I know that I'm effective? And I think kids… I don’t know. Kids keep signing up for my class, you know, and I mean I see their writing. It's good to see their writing actually because they may in class not express that much, or they may be tentative, and then when I see their writing, I can really follow the depth with which they have engaged in the thinking, in their unique thinking. So sometimes it's through their writing that I see it, or in, you know in Global Cit in their presentations, or maybe they ask great questions and energy hearings, I'm like “oh I didn't even know you were listening and there you are.” You know, I think their writing can be a great way, sometimes in class. You know, we're so lucky at B that kids literally come back and visit us and say that you were my favorite class, or they write emails, you know, we get a lot of feedback that way. I think there is that intangible. In a class, though, you can tell when it really mattered. I think kids can tell too. Like once in a while, you get to have a conversation that's like, “oh, this was something different. This wasn't the everyday, ‘oh you asked questions and I answered them.’” Where you really went beyond where you had planned, and you have like a meaningful conversation where people learn things that they're actually going to remember for their life. And you just can feel that when that happens, right? You can't have that every day. But I think you can work on creating an environment where that's possible. And hopefully that happens a few times a year, I think, you know.

Kiera 35:58
My next question has to do with like, and you can pass any question because this is a kind of another personal question, but it's about burnout and especially with the pandemic, and just like, how do you, especially since you're dealing with the workshop too… Since those good days, I feel like, often come from exerting actually so much of ourselves as a human, like how do you balance that with, like, being okay?

Katie 36:46
Yeah, no it's been really hard. I mean I just lowered my standards so much in this pandemic. I think doing things through zoom was interesting to do because we had last year through March like I built the relationships, at least with humanities with my, you know I had a Global Cit class was started in February and then we were out in March that class was never connected but I was like whatever, their seniors they're good enough. So, we learned some interesting stuff, but we didn't really get deep into things, and Humanities had enough connection that they could kind of carry it through. It was so hard to start Humanities on Zoom, and I think it's been, it's fine. I think it's good but it's nowhere near where it would normally get to by now the kind of depth of connection we'd feel, and our ability to just throw out our ideas would be so much more developed than it is now. So, I don't know if it's ever going to be like that because we're sitting in rows six feet apart, but it's better, it's definitely better to be in person. My workshop kids it’s terrible. I've had a bunch of kids drop out of high school, which is just, it's awful. It's so sad. So how do I fight burnout? I mean it's interesting probably depends on the kind of person you are, if you're like a type A person. I think it's incredibly difficult because you just have such high standards. A good friend of mine, you know, she had to change jobs because she just couldn't face… she would plan so much and she would always have their papers graded and she would just, you know, have everything ready and then sometimes the institution lets you down. It's so
hard, and like public school it's so big and it changes, like, it's like a battleship. You know, so you just make these tiny shifts and change. You know, you hear so much about, “oh, we should have problem-based learning,” or “we should have no grades,” you know, like these big shifts and I think there's an image that we could somehow have an education system where kids are just always curious and experiencing pleasure and joy and into it and, and then your like day to day it's like what are we doing here we're just plugging through this curriculum and so sometimes the vision and the what's actually happening, there's this big disconnect. Anyway, I think if you're really type A, that's very hard. I think if you’re a person who can just like shift constantly, shift expectations, you need to be an optimistic person - So I say for me, I am an optimistic person. Like I said, I meet these kids that are not likable and I'm like, I'm gonna like you. I know that I will. I don't know how that's gonna happen, but I believe that it will. I think I do feel like I every day, reflect on what happened and think, Hmm, you know, how can I do that differently. So, a willingness to shift and change and sort of like an optimistic belief that it can get better, you need to have that. But at the same time, know that a whole bunch of stuff’s gonna fail - a whole bunch of stuff isn't gonna go how you want it to. People are gonna disappoint you all the time. Yeah, and also a little bit of selfishness, like you need to really just take time for yourself sometimes. That's why your papers would take so long to come back because your teacher was like, so overwhelmed. So, you know, I remember when I used to teach like more like world history and stuff like that, at some weeks I just like you know I think it's time for a group project. We need to do a group project because I just can't stand in front of the room anymore. And that can still be a valid experience, you know, but you just got to like take care of yourself. I have no problem taking care of myself, you know, there will be days I was like, “you know what? We’re going to watch a movie today. That's all I've got, and that's okay.” So, yeah. and some of them probably needed to watch a movie that day too. So, you just can't be type A, I think you have to be really flexible.

Kiera 41:30
Okay, so, going back to that professor I had at SDSU that changed my life… what kind of inspired this project is that I couldn't - and there will never be this like, “this is how you influence as many people as possible,” you know, but I couldn't think of a word that described how this person influenced my life. Because like you said, it's just kind of like intangible, so I created this word, it's called inspiragation, and it's combining inspire and imagination together, because I felt like that's what they did to me - that's the state of mind I was in. So, I'm just curious, out of your experiences, how or what would you say that kind of looks like or what is that?

Katie 42:51
Yeah, I think you have to create an environment where you first have to have a relationship. Relationships are so important. People have to feel seen. They have to feel competent. You have to make them feel like they have whatever skills they need to engage in the work that you're doing. They need to feel safe, like they sort of need the teacher to both be creating a container, like they know that you're a person who's gonna say no if somebody goes too far, you were like “no stop that, you can't do that” like they kind of want that. But they also need to see you engaging with them, like I said I've talked about personal things, but in this way, that’s like, like, you can't just go right in there but like, “I had this boyfriend once” That’s like too much information, right? They want you to be their teacher. You know, they didn't sign up for like a
support group. They want a leader. And yet, you need to be this person who invites authenticity, being personal, so you do that by, you know, if you are personal with them, they know they can be personal with you, but you also have a container like there's a line and I'm not going to let anybody go beyond that. You have to believe that the work you're doing matters and is interesting, and is going to impact their future, you know. You have to be curious, and you have to ask questions you authentically that don't know the answer to that you want to know the answer to, you know. You have to learn from them and like show that like, “Oh my god. I never thought about that before. Let's go with that idea, that's amazing that you just came up with that,” you know, I think there's a kind of way of being, or something, that those things that I described and if you can be that in the room, and if you have the right group… if you can sort of be that person who's like prepared and safe and ready and probing, I mean, I think they use that phrase “warm demander” and that's a part of it, that you have standards and that you're warm that's a little part of it, but there's, you know, there's sort of more to it than that. But if you can be those things, then you've created the environment, and then you'll see what happens if there's like something too right there. It'll, it'll happen. I mean it's just a careful blend of being with them, but also being like you're holding the space for them, you're making a container that's really safe for them, you're not just one of them, you're something a little bit different, you know, you're facilitating and making them feel really safe to be themselves and interested and curious and all that stuff. So yeah, I don't know. It's hard. But all you can do is make the space, and then see, sometimes the magic happens and sometimes it doesn't. It's so funny, we were just having this conversation the other day, like, every once in a while, you just have this class that's like, amazing, that's like, it's just everything comes together, and it's the right people and it's the right time, that's the right question and it's like I said, with my cohort in grad school, it was just the alchemy of the moment and the people once in a while that happens, but that's happened to me like three times in 25 years of teaching. I've had a really awesome classes, but like magical classes, you know, once in a while that might have happened to you, with your professor, you know that magical relationship or was also the right time, the right question the right everything. You know, so that doesn't always happen, but you can create the opportunity for it, right, increase your chances. Yeah, and so you just have to believe that it's possible. And, yeah, it's like yeast dough or whatever, right temperature, the right ingredients, something like that. And be positive with them, like, it's hard in like a discussion class. It's easy to blame them, but, so that's fundamental too, is that it's easy to blame them. And I do sometimes I'll come out of class and be like “God they were so lame today.” But I know that it's not them, it's me. So, then I have to always have the attitude of, like, what can I change? What can I tweak? Sometimes it's stuff that I don't say to them, it's like just work on my questions or change the reading or… and then sometimes it's stuff I do say to them I might say to them like, “You guys, this is what I saw, we tried to do this activity, and this is what I saw. So how can we make it work better?” And they may sometimes tell me something really smart. I remember one year they were like I still make them raise their hands in discussion because I feel like if I don't make them raise their hands the quiet people never jump in, they never jump in, and it's funny I never call on people like Mr. E, he calls on people, you had him for class, right? And he can call on people, it feels natural. When I call on people, I feel like I'm punishing people. But anyways, I had this one class was like. you know you call on us so randomly that it stresses me out. I don't know if they were like, “we really would rather if you just go in order.” And I was like, “Okay, I can do that.” And it actually was really helpful, you know. If you ask real questions, they can give you simple answers that you're like okay, yeah, let's do it. But yeah, I think it's that, fundamentally, you have to believe.
You have to believe it's possible. You have to believe that there's something that you can do that can make it happen, and you have to be gentle with yourself that it's also sort of magical, so you can't… you got to just keep trying to get just get back up on that horse and try again. And if you have that approach, then they will probably come to you. Again, they're like animals so like we got to be bossy and loving at the same time. Oh my god, and they can see it in you. Like they can read you in the first minute of class, like, “You know what you're doing? Oh, you don't? Oh, this will be fun.” Okay, well there's a lot of face palms, it's hard. Teaching it's so hard. It's so, so hard. You just had to be gentle with yourself. Are you a type A personality?

Kiera 51:01
I feel like, no. I don't think so. I'm very flexible. So yeah, I've got that going for me. I think I'm type A in terms of, like, I have a lot of lists. I have a lot of feeling like my self-worth is tied to what I get done. Yeah, so I don't know that's type A, but I think it makes me feel in control if I write things down and check boxes off.

Katie 51:43
No that makes sense, but like in class, you have to be able to, like, say, “Ooh that plan is not working.” That's when you have the out of body experience, is like when your lesson isn't working and you're like, “Oh shit, this is what we're doing, we're doing it.” you're like, “well I'm going to move on to step three, even though this whole thing is horrible,” and your body is like, “we need to do step three,” and your mind is like, “Ahhhh, this is awful!” This will happen to you, that will happen to you. It's terrible, you know, and then you're gonna pivot. It's really hard.

Kiera 52:39
Okay, well the last question is, is just, like, I'm making a book list at the end of my thesis for fun. So, if you had a book that influenced you, or a book that you teach in class and you're like this is a great teaching book, or even a fun book…

Katie 52:58
Have you ever read Lisa Delpit? She writes books about teaching students of color that are really powerful, so she's got several books she's kind of old, I mean, she's sort of older, but she has a newer book called *Multiplication is For White People*, which is actually I think really an insightful book, color, um, other books…

Kiera 53:21
You can also email me if that's easier too.

Katie 53:28
Yeah, alright.

Kiera 53:30
Okay and then I just, I'm going to ask, is there anything that you said that you would want, reflecting that you're like, Oh, can you actually omit that because I didn't want to say, I don't think so. I think so. Okay. And then I'll just say that the interview will be transcribed, and the audio and audio-visual recording will be deleted immediately after the transcription is created
and the research collected for this study will not be used for any purpose besides the senior thesis.

Katie 54:04
Yeah, Good luck with your writing!

Kiera 54:09
Thank you!

Recording Ends.

MARA

Recording Begins.

Kiera 0:01
Do I have your consent to record this interview?

Mara 0:05
Yes.

Kiera 0:05
Awesome. Okay, and then just some preliminary questions… so what would you like me to refer to as? Would you like me to use a pseudonym? Or are you okay with me using your real name?

Mara 0:20
My real name is fine.

Kiera
Okay. And then if you're comfortable sharing your gender identity and what pronouns you use, how you identify racially and ethnically, and if you would consider yourself a young-adult, middle-aged adult or a senior.

Mara 0:38
Yeah, okay. So, I identify as a female and I go by she/her

Kiera 1:00
Nice. And then how do you identify racially and ethnically?

Mara 1:06
So, let's see, I identify as Korean, American, Alaskan. I would call myself Irish. That's weird. But my parents are Caucasian, so I was adopted when I was a baby, so I mean, clearly, politically, I identify as Asian-American, but I definitely like to identify as culturally Caucasian.

Kiera 1:37
And then would you consider yourself a young adult, a middle-aged adult, or a senior?
Mara 1:42
I suppose I would consider myself middle-aged but saying it sounds kind of funny.

Kiera 1:46
Don’t worry you are not alone in that - literally every single person I've asked have been like, “well, I feel like I'm a young adult, but I guess…” Yeah. Thanks for sharing all that. Okay, and then just some background teaching questions. So, what is your educational background? Where did you get your bachelor's degree? Where did you get your teaching credential?

Mara 2:07
So, I have a political science degree with a minor in Women's Studies and French from Southern Oregon University in Ashland, Oregon. And I got that kind of straight out of high school, graduated there in the winter of 2003. And so, my background really is in grassroots organizing and politics, engaging citizens, and being a part of our democracy. Um, with that background, like running for office, and like being involved in the decision law-making process was like, you know, my goal since I was in high school. I ran for assembly when I was 23, in 2005, and that was a slap in the face. You know, I was told, we need more young people, we need more women, we need more minorities, we need all these things, but not now. I don't really share my political party with my students, and I'm actually a non-partisan now. But when I was growing up, I was a Democrat. And I was kind of brought by the democrats I interned them for them and everything. So, when I ran for assembly, I, you know, went around, and I got everybody's approval and everything, which was early on, cause I'm a planner, and then I ended up running against kind of a middle-aged, white, male, Republican who was president of the Chamber of Commerce. So suddenly, fear struck everybody. And they were like, “well, she's not going to be able to hold her own.” So, the democrats recruited a former Republican, like 69-year-old converted democrat male to run against me. By that point, I had already put my name in the ring, and I had asked everybody and I was like, “No, I'm, I'm doing this.” So, we live in such a small city, but I feel like five or six thousand people vote in to win. And I think, you know, I got seven votes. So, the democrat that was recruited by the Democrats won by like 1,000, and I trailed the conservative that they were afraid I wouldn't win against by seven, seven votes. And he outspent me by like, three, three times. So, the day after that election, I registered as a non-partisan and kind of like, was heartbroken about the party system. But anyway, um, I guess from there, like, I kind of had to make a choice whether I was going to keep running or if there was a different passion that I had that I wanted to pursue, and I had worked for the Teen Health Center, which is like a Teen Health Center that is hosted within the high school and at JDHS and I, when I did that I was able, I had the flexibility to co advise a student government. I had worked for a lot of different places by this point, like the Junior Economic Development Council, and the women’s shelter, and like all these different areas that have my background, and been pretty, like unfulfilled. And so, I just kind of reflected on like, this is really kind of my most fulfilling moment, although actually I mean, so then I decided to go to law school. So, I moved to Washington. I was starting to get residency there, and then and then I had this moment of like, do I really want to be a lawyer? What do I want to do? So that's when I decided that I wanted to become a teacher. And I had actually spent six months teaching in Korea kind of doing a heritage thing, but also like, trying out teaching. And so, then I came back to Juneau and did my master's program. So that's a one-year program. And that was in 2010, so seven years later, and it was kind of intended to be like a
filler until I was ready to get back into politics. But the more I do it, the more I love it, and like this, you're working for the school district has been horrible, and it has made me definitely reflect on whether I wanted to like do something different, and it just, I guess, confirmed even more that I really, really, really love teaching. And this year is the first year that I haven't done Student Government. So, I actually gave that up this year, which was pretty hard. But after like I left and some other kids after that, it was more challenging for me and I, you know, I had children and kind of my priorities shifted a little bit. And so, it was a very hard decision for me to make but, and then the pandemic made it really easy. So, I decided and, and I had to kind of be like, it's not over like I can do Student Government another time and maybe they'll be like another swing where I'm in it, but like if my heart wasn't into it, and I didn't really have the passion that I used to, to really give it to and work with students, I figured I should take a break. So that's a really long answer to your question.

Kiera 7:16
No, you actually you covered a couple of my questions, so it was perfect. Yeah, so which subject(s) do you teach in high school? And how long have you been teaching at the high school level?

Mara 7:32
So, like, my story says, like, I'm really passionate about teaching government. And you know, you can't be a full-time government teacher, so that kind of put me grid locked me into social studies, which is an interesting thing, since I'm not one of those people who memorizes all these historical facts or anything like that. So, I do teach social studies, so I have typically I have two government classes. And then through time, like I taught psychology, I've taught Alaska history, I've taught U.S. history. And right now, I'm kind of happy with my current caseload where I teach Alaska history, which I think is very like… it's kind of political to me, like, the fact that we have Alaska history to me, like I've seen it, I've observed and witnessed people teach it in different ways. And there aren't a whole lot of like standards. But for me, the reason why, I mean, there's a lot of reasons why a state has a requirement to teach history, its history, but for me, there's a lot of misunderstanding about Alaska Native people having like, quote, unquote, free money, or they get their schools paid for or whatever. And so like, I really have a desire to teach it in regard to having people understand like the history of our place, and like land ownership and the things that have like historically happened to minority groups in our communities, and like really understanding that in order to move forward and things like that, so I teach it, I hope I teach it in a pretty like culturally relevant kind of governmental perspective. And then of course, like, later on, I married a Tlingit man, and so like him, and then and I was adopted into like, a clan, and my children are part of that clan. So now, in addition to kind of like that, teaching, like teaching governmental citizenship drive I had just from the beginning, but now I also have like a very personal connection to it. So, I enjoy teaching that. And then psychology I like to teach the least because it’s so science-y, and I love taking psychology, but I hadn't figured out how to make it conceptually… I just don't know how to really teach it. So that one probably made me cry the most as a teacher. And so, U.S. history, even though I don't feel like I have all the facts memorized, like, conceptually, I think that's a lot easier and to kind of bring that back to present day and why it matters, and why it's relevant. So that hasn't been as painful. I'm teaching it this year for the first time in like, eight years. And I was a little bit like, horrified by it. But it's, it's not as horrible as it could be. So yeah.
Kiera 10:36
Yeah, it’s funny when I do these interviews, I feel like I have so many questions that pop into my brain after you speak. But I'm like, No, but I need to address the questions I wrote down. Um, okay, I'll ask, because this is something I've kind of started asking, even though I didn't initially write it down. So, given that you teach, or you have taught, like government-oriented classes, what is the reason why you don't share your own political stances? Because I've heard different, like, this has been something that's risen multiple times, and I'm just curious what your stance is on that, and why you choose not to.

Mara 11:23
Um, when I teach government, like, we do a section on the executive branch, and it talks about how the president has a ‘bully pulpit,’ and how, you know, that influences people. And so, like I have, and I know, teachers vary on this, but like, objectivity is very important. And like me, not teaching a bunch of students to think like me, is really important. And so, I think, not sharing, like, I think that I'm influential, and I think that the things that I believe in will then impact my students and how they think. And by the time you're senior, you know, you're pretty old, and you can kind of make your own decision. And I have let it slip, like, I'm sure my student government kids who like I really felt connected to I have said, on like, trips in the car, you know, and told them stories, because it's part of a question that they asked me, and I can't really answer it without explaining my life experiences. And then I'll tell them like, “Shhh, but you know, don't tell people that.” And so, like, I think a lot of it is just the influence and then just like the impact and the groupthink like I want to give the most like the safest space and the freedom for students to be able to make their own judgments about things and to be comfortable with that judgment being not the same as mine, and to know that they can disagree with me, and that they can still be really smart, and like, critical thinkers. I do a voting assessment where kids like, do a mock voting, and then kind of explain why. And I always like give kids, well, I don't know if that's a good example, but like reflections about things. I always tell people, like you can say you hated it, or that you didn't like it like, and whenever students do that, I always want to make sure that I give them full credit so they don't feel like somehow I dock them. And even more now, during this pandemic, like, I teach students about the five concepts of democracy, and one of them is like, majority rules, minority rights, and I think that the dissenting opinion is incredibly important and incredibly strong. And having been in a minority, as like a woman and a woman of color, and most recently, as like a tele-working teacher was about to get, like not be able to telework anymore, I think it's really important that the dissenting opinion is respected and that people are able to voice that. And I always say, like, I'm gonna say this, and it's not because I want you to do things my way because I know that the dissenting opinion is respected and that information in order to like honor their ability to be in a dissenting opinion that might be against mine, so I just don't put that out there to be another, like, barrier for them.

Kiera 15:07
Okay, that totally makes sense. Thank you. Yeah, so now we'll just kind of jump into the main teaching questions. So, the overall question is, do you try to inspire critical thinking and or
critical consciousness-raising within your students? And how? Or do you have a current teaching pedagogy or strategies that you utilize?

Mara 15:37
Since the beginning, like my teaching strategy has always been hands on life experience, like we learn from doing, and I'm a very kinesthetic learner, so I have to physically, like do things in order to learn them. And so, I'm pretty lucky in the sense that history and government are all real. So, everything that I teach, like I try not to do like busy work, or something made up like, you know, when students research laws, they look go through real laws, the real databases, and, you know, we make a real voter guide, and we bring candidates into the classroom, and we meet them, and we make sure we're representing them, and then we send the voter guide to parents and teachers in order to help them educate them about voting. So, I think, I also think that it's super important to understand who my students are, and that they their identity that they bring is then the most like, powerful thing that I have as a teacher. And so like, we do a PowerPoint about who they are, and what their passions are, and what their post high school plans are, what their hobbies are, you know, that's really like me understanding like, how can I connect their service learning projects so that it's going to be meaningful for them? And that they're going to get the most out of it? How can I get them to write a letter to the editor about something that they're really passionate about? Because parents come for parent conferences, and everybody's, like, “Ohhh, government…” you know, and they bring this like, prenotation. And I know that, and that's fine. But like, I spend the first week just having students understand that government impacts every single thing we do, from the moment we wake up to the water we use to brush our teeth, like, and you can not like the government and you can like, turn your head to it, but like, that's not what our democracy is about, and really like, teaching students how, like, we have to be aware, and we have to be educated, and we have to participate. And it's not just about voting, which we actually fail to do at a very good, you know, level, but it's also about knowing what bills are out there. And it's about, you know, being the experts and questioning things. And so, using the things that they're like passionate about, to then connect it, I think is like my biggest teaching strategy. So, hands on student-centered, student-focused… inquiry. You know, I also think, and I don't know that this is not like a teaching lingo, but like, I know that we also are at a point where like, we criticize the government, and a lot of the government has done a lot of bad things. And so like, in trying to make government more like culturally relevant and responsive, like I have talked with teachers who are like, “well, you don't teach them about all these horrible things that the government has done?” And I'm like, “No, I don't. Not because I don't know that they happened, or because I don't think that they're horrible. I do. But because I believe that the first step in getting them involved is for them to have understanding and believe.” Right? Like, my four-year old’s watching Star Wars for the first time, and like I'm trying to pull out, like, what are the messages I want him to learn? And, you know, it's like, how come Luke Skywalker couldn't pull the thing out of the mud? And I said, because he didn't believe right. Belief is the most fundamental thing that is going to start anything and everything we do. And so like, I want students to believe in government. Yeah, somebody asked me like, “have you talked to your kids about culture and like, you know, in as Native American boys that like they're going to be shot the most by like police officer?” And I’m like, “No. Not because I'm not aware of it. But because they’re two, they’re four, like I'm teaching them what culture is. And I'm in having them embrace that and understand that, and then when they're ready, that I'm going to like, talk to them about like the other stuff. So, I mean, I guess there is a teacher… like scaffolding.
Scaffolding is really important. It's really important to help students have buy-in and ownership and empowerment. Like my primary goal in teaching is to empower students to participate, and that they have to understand their role and how they can be a part of that change, before they're, like, bombarded with all these, like bad things that have happened.

Kiera 21:01
Okay, so my next question is, how much of “you” do you display your students? Or in other words, how much are you authentically yourself? And do you grapple with wearing like a “teaching hat” and a “Mara hat?” And where do you draw that line?

Mara 21:21
Yeah, I mean, I think that that's constantly a balance. You have to have boundaries, and you have to have like privacy. But I also like, and especially as being a minority, it's a balance, a really important balance, and I think, but I also recognize that like, when I was student teaching, an Asian student looked at me and said, “Are you my teacher?” and it was like, the first day that I was subbing, and I said, “Yeah,” and he said, “Wow, you're the first Asian teacher that I've ever had.” And like, 1% of teachers in Alaska are Asian. And so like, I always kind of remember that. And I always kind of remember too that, like, government teachers typically tend to be and this is also just a makeup of Alaska, right, but they tend to be Caucasian. And they tend, sometimes to be men. And so like, I also honor, like, if I know that the most important tool I have to teach my students is to understand who they are, and what they're bringing to the table than they equally know that who I am, and what I bring to the table is also an important part. And I spend like a good week, and then it's a heavy theme throughout all of my courses is to talk about perspectives. And you know, and I say, you need to not only be aware of what perspective your book is taking, or the article is taking, or the media that your reading is taking, but like, we typically don't really know a lot about our teachers, and the perspective that they bring, like I said, I bring my own bias no matter what. And I also find it interesting that, you know, most of the time that I'm in a course, or a class, I'm always like, “Who is this person?” Right. And when I ran for assembly, the number one thing I did before I would interview with somebody or try to get information was figuring out, who are they? and I would do a, you know, you would do like a quick Google and learn some information about them, like what are the things we have in common? Or, you know, what are some topics that I can bring up. And so, I share that with students. And I also know that I'm in a minority of being adopted. And so, I often talk about that, just because I know that a lot of my students are adopted, and the more that like they see these common threads like that, they just don't think that everybody lives this, like cookie cutter, you know, story or whatever. So, I do think that those are important things to share. And I do share them. I don't share my political opinions. And you know, I've already said why, but I do like I question, and I think out loud and I kind of like over the time as not being a younger teacher like I've gotten comfortable with not knowing everything, and things like that. So, I do like I do spend time like before my students do that like slideshow, or they give me an about them, I give them my entire like life story. And it fits into that lesson about perspectives. And that then, is our lens and how we see things, and how lucky we are that we get to be in this classroom with so many different unique lenses and perspectives and how that light gives us a diverse thing and
how democracy is messy and dirty, and we shouldn't all think the same, and even though it seems that makes it inefficient, and unproductive that that's actually a sign that our democracy is healthy. And so really trying to like, you know, make all of those kind of personal things then, like connect and make sense to democracy, which like, hadn't always worked the way I wanted to. And this year, I ended up with an MIT. And it's like, virtual online, and my kids are like, in the other room, and I'm like, “I don't know how this is going to pan out. But sure, why not.” And like, I was always amazed that like, I couldn't have planned that any better if I had tried to make those connections just slide together and kind of kind of make sense. And that's why I teach government, like, it makes sense in my brain, you know, we start really big picture, we get more narrow, like it really flows. And I really enjoy it.

Kiera 26:18
So yeah. And then so this is like, you can just say I feel like I already answered this, but if you're comfortable sharing, how do your own identities across race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, ability, etc. influence your teaching in the classroom, if they do? You kind of touched on that, but if you had anything else to say about it?

Mara 26:41
Yeah, um, I mean, how confidential is this interview?

Kiera 26:48
At the end of the interview, I'm also going to ask if you want me to omit anything, you can, like, speak freely, and then we can go back on it if you want.

Mara 26:57
Okay. Um, yeah, I mean, and I think maybe I'm okay. One of the things early on that I did, like struggle with regards to that, is that I do have a mental health diagnosis. And I had an instinct to like… I wanted to kind of share that with students, because I know that we have stigmas around mental health and that just in the same way that I was adopted, like, I felt like I could connect and reach out. But I think over time, I didn't, I never did, and it was hard for me to understand why at first, and I guess I had another teacher that I was kind of like mentoring with, and she said to me, like, “I'm a teenage Mom, I had my kid when I was a teenager. And there were sometimes teaching that like I wanted to talk about that because it felt right, you know,” and she said, “but I think in the end, I didn't, and partly because if I'm being this role model, and now students are like…” and it's a little bit different than like, a mental health, like, I think for me, mental health gets into like, “Am I fit to be a teacher?” Like, right? We live in a society that's like, “if I know this, about that person, is that person fit?” So then there's all this stigma and black, you know, and stereotyping and stuff, so I think it's a little bit different analogy, but I think it helped me kind of like, you know, we do need to have privacy and we do need to have like boundaries with our students and like I help participate with like sources of strength, and I can like model like, you know, which is based off of like positive assets and positive thinking, and growth mindsets, and so like, I guess, I have leaned toward, like, I don't need to share everything about me, but I can model and help with asset building and with positive growth mindset and things like that. And so that I think, over time, kind of like filled that void or need for me to feel like I needed to model that behavior or something.
Kiera 29:28
Thank you for sharing that. It is a very personal question. So yeah, thank you. So, the next question is, what role does discipline play in your classroom? So how do you engage with both the real and assumed power you hold as an authority figure?

Mara 29:52
Yeah, I mean, I constantly just tell kids like that I need to be mean, and I make jokes, about like, “well, I'm gonna be meaner next year!” And that doesn't mean that like, I'm definitely loud. You can't I mean, so, like, I'm five foot, one, and a lot of times people can't find me in the classroom, but I can definitely be loud and scary. And so like, I think, obviously, like, zoom is very different. There are no discipline problems. But I think like, I'm not a disciplinarian. I believe in positive reinforcement I believe in positive modeling. Love and Logic, like, our principal was big on Love and Logic. So, it's like, you can stay in my classroom and work on your government, and I can help you, or there's the door, and you can go out the door, and if you want to come back, and you want me to help you, then I will. So, I guess that's kind of my mindset. I do have, like, I don't know, I have, this is gonna sound so bizarre, out of context. But like, I have, like, beer-eyed goggles, like, you know, some teachers see the beer shirts, and some teachers don't. And like, I believe in protocol, because I teach government, right? So, I believe in these rules, and these disciplines. So, I don't ignore the beer shirts in my room. But I, you know, I politely say like, “you know, can I help you? Can you go to the bathroom and turn your shirt inside out?” As I got older, and this is like, kind of a gray line, but I try to add humor, you know, like, “Oh, my gosh, all I can do is think about beer when I'm staring at your shirt. Now, I can't teach government!” I'm always like, kind of, like, now they're gonna think I'm an alcoholic, but, you know, kids would swear in my room and I would say things like, “Oh, my ears are hurting! My ears! They don't hear swear words!” You know, I guess like trying to build off of community and trying to build off of, like, people's own accountability and responsibility has kind of been my aspect and discipline and, and sometimes I'm part of the problem. I mean, we definitely have had classes where, like, we're sitting there, and we're all just talking and they're supposed to be reading the constitution and then it's like, “Oh, my gosh, I am like, part of the problem here.” You're not getting your work done. But I think relationship building is the number one thing in regard to like getting students to abide by rules in your classroom, and by having a community where everybody is taking care of one another.

Kiera 33:04
Okay, and then you kind of touched on this a very beginning, one of the questions is, do you connect lessons to the real world and student experiences, and how? I know you mentioned, like bringing in bringing people in and reading documents and current events and stuff?

Mara 33:26
Yeah, yeah. I mean, all of my extra credit is like real world. So, like for history, I say, like, “Okay, I know, you're out hiking all day, all weekend, or whatever, like, so tell me, how did that place get its name? Like, who is it named after? What does it mean?” Like, you know, and a lot of Alaska history in general is like, they're place based names. And then they're like, all these other names that we know, but why and how do they get the name and who was that person? So that's kind of one way and then like real world government, you know, I always tell my government students, you could probably do zero assignments in my class and get an A, just by
doing real world government. Like, you sat in an assembly meeting and you did a summary and reflection, you sat in on a school board meeting, and you did a summary and a reflection, because that's real world. I mean, how can I not pass a kid for government when they're doing all those things? And again, like making their service learning connect to who they are, you know, I do an attendance question every day where I can learn and hear from every student and then that helps me then connect, you know, again, like making it more personal. And then, you know, like I said, every assignment - it's a real-world learning assignment. Even like when, you know, Black Lives Matter happened this summer, and then I'm teaching students about reconstruction in U.S. history, and it's like, “Okay, so what do you see that's the same or different from reconstruction? Like, how are some of these things that we see this summer during the Black Lives Movement? Like how is that a ripple effect from reconstruction? Or how is it not a ripple effect? How have we like grown past that?” You know, so really trying to make things relevant. Kids do a current event journal where like, mainly, I'm trying to get them to learn how to look at the news daily, and have that become a habit, but also like, how can we learn about not just the things in our textbook, but the things going on in the real world, that then correlate to our textbook, so making those real-life connections are really important. And then, you know, every year we would do a Capitol tour. You know, J had this dream that we would host an AASAG, so the Alaska Association of Student Governments, and I, like agreed to it, and then found out I was pregnant, and so we hosted that conference when my first kid was seven months, and I told him, like, I would never have done this for anybody, but you. Not just because he had this dream and vision, but also because he is incredibly determined, incredibly persistent, incredibly organized, and incredibly capable. So, I knew that he was going to be like, a 100% team in doing that, and that we could do this and pull it off, you know. But I mean, the fact that we got 330 students from across the state, and Juneau hosted AASAG all the time. But we got 330 kids through the Capitol Building, right? We got 330 kids and the governor came and talked to them, and we figured it out. So, I mean, when I first started teaching, like I don't think students were doing Capitol Building tours, you know, and we don't do it now in the pandemic. But, you know, I always take the students to the Capitol Building. This is hands on learning, this is what I am teaching them about, how can I not take them? And then they learn about a bill, and then they write a testimony, and then we actually sit in one of the committee rooms, and have like the legislative Information Officers act as senators, and then they do a whole mock hearing. And then students are allowed to go up and read their testimony. So, things like that I think are really important. I think, again, being a kinesthetic learner, that if they've done it once before, then they'll do it again, it's like voting, right? If you vote when you're 18, you're going to vote every year, every year, every year. And so, if they are 17 or 18, and they've sat in a testimony room, and they've read the testimony and done it, then the likelihood that they'll do it is going to be greater, you know. So really giving them the tools and empowering them with the ability to participate as much as they possibly can, in this limited amount of time that I have them is really important. And that's all real life, real life learning.

Kiera 38:41
Thank you. Okay, and then just kind of a funny question, but how do you measure something that is potentially measurable, such as your ability to influence your students? So how do you know when you're like, that was that magic?

Mara 39:12
Yeah, I mean, I guess part of it is, is that you don't. You don't measure it. At some level, it is like intrinsic, and at some level, your success. I'm a humble person, or I feel like I'm a humble person. I don't feel like I need credit, but I'm also human, so there are moments when I'm like, like… you know. But I think it's when you're left behind the most, that you're the most successful, right? Like Student Government, when I started it was, in my honest opinion, a disaster. It was like an elite group of kids making pancakes for themselves doing nothing, you know, going to conferences, and then like skipping out and going to the mall or whatever. And then, and then we like moved it to this, like well-oiled machine where kids knew what their job was, I mean, it got to the point where I had, like executive board members, like we made this appointment form because we want kids to fill it out and like, there's going to be this new procedure and like, and, you know, now I'm popping out kids, and I'm like, I don't have any idea. Sure, okay, if that's what you know, because I'm just advising them. But they know their role. They know what they're supposed to do. They're training their underparts, and that's doesn't sound right, but you know. I think you know that you're successful because it runs without you. You know you're successful because you can pull off really big conferences. You know you're successful because your students go out into the world and do amazing things. It was very anticlimactic to give up Student Government last year. And I did have like some moments of like, “nobody even cares that you're going to quit doing this.” I had a student, another student of student government who like, asked me for a letter of recommendation for something. And then I was like, you know, she had graduated, and so I was being a little bit more real with her. And I was telling her that I was kind of struggling with, I don't know if I have a job and like with this teleworking, but I'm not going to go in person, and I'm going to make this letter for you, but I didn't do it yet, and I'm sorry. And, you know, and he was like, at this point, like, you're an amazing teacher, like, you have inspired so many of us and like don't ever question like your ability to teach and it was really nice, because it was like, right at the moment when I needed to hear it the most. And so, I really appreciated that. That's a really long-winded answer that has like, no real answer. Like, I mean, it's intrinsic, you do it, because that is like… that's why I teach government. It's why I do what I do. It's what I'm passionate about, and so it's not measurable and you just don't really know, I guess.

Kiera 42:39
I really appreciate that answer. Yeah. Okay, so the next question, I created this word, which is in the title of my project, but it's *inspiraginat*ion, and it's combining, inspire and imagination together to describe an experience I had my first year in college with this professor that kind of just clicked this thing and inspired me, I guess. And so, I guess there's no wrong answers, but just based off of that word, like, how would you say you would define it?

Mara 44:05
I guess the thing that pops into my head is like limitless, right? It's the same reason why oftentimes, like I don't give students normally like a number requirement for essays or even like how a product needs to be finalized. Like, you know, if I give a rubric and then I'm like, but really like you, you however, you want to take this information, and then give it back to me. And so I guess that's what I think of when I hear that word, and I get that students want examples, and they want concrete answers, and they want to know their expectations, but sometimes our biggest moments of growth sometimes come when we're uncomfortable, and we're taking risks, and when we don't know what it is exactly that we're doing. And so like, that's also what that word
kind of encompasses, to me is this idea that, I have freedom, maybe it's freedom, that word it is like, I'm inspired, and I have this freedom and this imagination and partly like, again, I guess going back to that, like Star Wars analogy, belief, right? I mean, if we, like part of, I think to the thing with students, and Student Government is like, all we need, all they need is somebody to believe in them, that they can do it, that they have the ability to do it. And I feel like when I first started doing it, it kind of was like, I felt sometimes like I was trying to convince people, yes, they can do this. And then of course, once it turned into itself, everybody was like, “Well, yeah, of course, the students can do it, all the students will do that all the students are on that tour,” you know, and all those things. And, and it's the same kind of thing I think, in government, like, not only do we have to vote for people running for office, but we actually have to run for office, right? And when I have student government, and the kids are like, we don't want to run against each other, and I'm like, okay, but nobody wants to vote if the race is not contested. And sometimes it's not... like, sometimes winning isn't about whether we get elected or not. Sometimes it's about the voice we bring, sometimes it's about that we gave a choice. You know, like I always remember, I actually, like lost his first election as freshmen, class president, and it broke my heart, I was like, “Oh, my gosh.” And it ended up being this really big, like, it was almost like it was meant to be because we didn't have a school board Rep, and I was like, there could not be a more mature, capable, able, person. And so you know, we got him into that role and it was just, it felt kind of life changing, and it was going to be way more beneficial for J than it was going to be for him to be freshman class president. So I don't know, I guess that's kind of what I think of when I hear your word.

Kiera 47:10
Thank you. Yeah. Okay, and then this is just an open-ended question, but is there anything that you wanted to share that we didn't get a chance to discuss? If I didn't have a question, or it didn't prompt anything... I'm just creating that space, if there's anything, but it's totally okay if there's not.

Mara 47:36
I mean, I think just student-centered is really important, which I was able to say a lot. I mean, I think also, like, you asked about measurement, and I think you emailing me about the survey, I was like, “oh, have I taught well? Or not taught well...” and then it's like, “Oh, I just got asked... apparently I inspired...” You know, and so it's like, I feel like everything kind of circulates to a point where hopefully it's recognizable. But ultimately, again, like, the sign of a good teacher is the absence of a teacher, like when student when the teacher is not needed, because the students are totally capable and able, like, that's the whole point, right? You can catch a fish and feed somebody or you can teach them how to catch a fish, and then they don't even need you because they can go catch their own fish. And so, I think that's kind of like the whole point. And that's kind of been like the route of, of where I'm at. But I think the only thing that I might add, and I don't even know how to add it articulately is that, like I feel like my teaching is a journey and an evolution, and that I as a teacher evolve. And, and that kind of student government piece was very much foundational for me to become a teacher. But it's interesting. The place I'm at now is much more like kind of going back to my roots of like, anti-discrimination and equality, and how do I do that as a teacher and what does that look like? And a lot of it is like bureaucratic with the school board and in committees and meetings and things like that. But also trying to think about how staying student-centered, can I shift what I've done in regard to like empowering students
with voice? And how can I shift that to talk about race and culture and I don't know the answer to that. And you know, I have frequently tried to coin or inspire Student Government students to do like things like culture fairs or cultural days, which haven't really been taken well. And I even remember, kind of some heartbreak, like three or four years ago when the predominantly Caucasian group of students said, “Well, we don't have culture.” And it was like, I felt like, I was kind of being stabbed in the heart in the sense of like… by nature, Student Government kids are in the top 10%, you know. I'm like, if these students don't understand that they have culture, and don't know how to embrace it, which I think is one of the biggest feet paws about being, and I'm trying not to use the word white anymore, but like, it's like, I don't have culture? Well, yes, you do. You came from England, or France… I took French for 10 years, like I've studied France, I know they have a lot of culture there. And so how can I continue to work with students, and teachers and administration, but mostly students, and somehow, just as it was natural and intuitive to empower them with the ability to have a voice and be a part of like the system and the process, how does that look like if I'm trying to inspire and engage students to be more aware or participating in their culture, especially in the majority, which is predominantly Caucasian? So, I guess that's kind of like where I'm at now.

Kiera 51:48
There's a lot to unpack, like, wow. I am curious, what is the reason why you're shying away from saying white though? I'm curious around that.

Mara 52:03
Um, let's see. So, like, I have steered away from saying the word Alaska Native. And I know it's a generic term, but like in Alaska, specifically, we have 11 Alaska Native cultures, and so it's a clump. It's a clump name, which can be like easier, but it also can be lazy, you know? And so, when I taught U.S. history, again, for the first time in like eight or nine years, I was like, well, my book doesn't start with Native Americans, which is how I start Alaska history because I'm kind of mirroring it with the way I tell U.S. history. And so, it's like, Huh, and then my husband works for Sealaska Heritage Institute, and he was listening or having a presentation, and somebody's talking about erasure or something similar to that. And I was like, “What is that?” And he was like, “Oh, that's when something is erased entirely from history.” And I was like, “That’s how I feel.” Like the Native Americans were from my textbook in the very beginning. Like, they talk about them later on in this war, but where were they in the very beginning? How come they're not in my textbook? And so, then it's like, I'm trying to decipher like, the hundreds of American Native tribes, like, how am I supposed to pick one or ten of them. So anyway, I'm having this whole processing, which then of course, comes back home to me of like, Asian descent. And so, I've actually quit using the word Asian, because it also like, is clumping so many diverse groups of people into one. I also tend to be really kind of in the middle of things regarding… like I tend to be more of the growth mindset and of bridges and I don't get really mad about things that happen about race. So, I don't know if I mean, I'm sure you can know that but I feel pretty like moderate. But I also feel like the words we use and the way we say things normalizes things. So even like our norming of saying the president, he, him you know. And even like as I'm raising my children, why is the snowman outside a man and so I've started calling it a snow person, you know, and there's all these things that are have this gender well, and then my youngest is two and a half and has called his grandma, ‘grandpa’ because like, and it just makes me start thinking like gender is so weird and how we teach gender to our kids and like
why can't that be grandpa? Like, why is it you know, when all these things and so I guess, as I'm like processing all of this, it also makes me feel like the term ‘White’ is part of the norming we do in which we have no culture, right? It's a term, which students can then say, “Well, I'm white, and I don't have a culture.” Well, but you're not white. You're French. You're European. You're German. And so, I guess, in the processing, I don't want to use the word Asian anymore, unless I'm teaching geography and I'm doing a region, you know, and so I don't call my kids Asian. I call them Korean, you know, and I don't call them Alaska Native. I call them Tlingit. So, when people ask me like, “Oh, what're your kids?” I say, “Oh, they're Korean Tlingit. Would it be wrong, though, some may call them Asian and Alaskan Native. No, and that's fine. But like, I consciously choose to acknowledge the names in which is very specific and very cultured. And I grew up, like I said, my parents are Caucasian, and I have been saying for the last almost 40 years, which sounds bizarre to me, like, my parents are white. My parents are white, like, I grew up until I was like, 30, I think I said, I'm a banana, like, I'm yellow on the outside, and I'm white on the inside. So, it's not like, I don't get how, or have done it. I totally have done it. But I guess I have this new kind of awareness of, well, white, then it seems to be associated with this non-culture. So how can I identify… so now I say Irish, because my great grandma is from Ireland. And so, we have a lot of this Irish culture. And so like, acknowledging, like, that specific thing I think is important. And Caucasian doesn't really do it for me, either, you know. So, like, it's a journey for me too, because sometimes I'm like, how do I explain this? And this is part of the thing, like, as I'm teaching Alaska history, I'm like, talking out loud about, like, these are the things going on in my brain, about words, you know, and how words have meanings, which goes back to again, like, you know, when you go out for your extra credit, like, what is that trail called? And who named it… or my oldest kid is Denali. And it's like, but then the mountain was McKinley, and, you know, all these things. And so, they all do have this kind of like, meaning and so that I guess is why I have come to try not to use the word white.

Kiera 57:40
Yeah. Meaning making. I’ll just ask one more question. And so, everything you just shared with me, would you say you openly express that process with your students?

Mara 58:01
Yep. Yeah. I mean, because like, I have somebody who comes in and presents about like, Alaska Native languages, and they talk about like, the term Eskimo and then how that word actually came from a French word from like Quebec area. And then like, it just got applied generically. And then, and then how a lot of these 11 tribes are like, now kind of reread, like renaming themselves or reclaiming their original names, which kind of follows like Denali versus McKinley. But just so you know, the most northern tip of Alaska, like, I don't know, five years ago, it renamed itself. And so, just like altitude is a very big word that is common and valued. And it took me years to understand this as a teacher, which is very uncomfortable to teach kids content and not really understand. And so there's like this process of clumping them together, and like reclaiming their Alaskan Native name for their place. And which, so anyway, just how things get their name and how we interpret them. Yeah, so as we're learning this and then I'm thinking that … Yeah, well, that's like how I feel about the word ‘alien.’ And so I just think and talk out loud with students and I always tell them like, it's not wrong, like you can and remember that like there are people who identify as Eskimo that's not wrong, but there is a movement to recognize the history behind it and to acknowledge the colonization behind it, and then to like,
empower and give people choices. And so, it's everybody's kind of individual choice and this is my choice, or this is my process. And so, I just kind of share that critical thinking process. And I also share that it's a journey, like I am not like, who knows what it will keep turning into, because, you know, learning is lifelong and it's an evolutionary process. So yeah, yeah. And that is something though that takes time, right. As a new teacher, I felt very uncomfortable with not knowing all the answers and was sharing some thought processes just because sometimes I'd be like, these kids are smart, you know, maybe these kids are smarter than me. like, Oh, my gosh, and then kind of being more comfortable in my role of like, an education has changed. I mean, when I went to school, you the teacher gave you information, but with the Internet, and you know, that's not my role. And so, I'm more comfortable in the fact that I know that I am teaching and modeling, and accepting diverse ways of critical thinking, you know? Yeah.

Kiera 1:01:12
Awesome. Okay. And then last question is I'm just creating a book list for fun at the end of my thesis. So, if you had like a book, where you're like, 'oh, that inspired me or heavily influenced my thinking’ or a fun book, or…

Mara 1:01:38
Yeah, yeah. I started Daring Greatly with Bernie Brown. So just the idea of like, our vulnerability is strength, and that, that strength, which kind of like flushes into this idea of like, the minority voice and diversity and just having that like, strength and bravery. And, and one of the things that my mentor taught me, right, is that conflict creates change. And that like, because, you know, as a new teacher, I was like, “Well, I don't want to make any conflict.” And he would always say, “well, conflict is the first step of change,” which I think is like one of the most inspiring things I've been taught in life, like, even like, as I am married, and have a family and all these things, like, every time I hit a path of conflict, and I want to, like, kind of be like, angry or like, like mad, then I just remember, like, this conflict right now is the beginning steps of making change. So, I kind of anyway, I can think of Yeah, I'll try to think but that that's the only book that kind of jumps out at me.

Kiera 1:02:57
Thank you. Yeah. Okay, then I'm just gonna say, we're done with the questions, but I'll just ask. So, is there anything that you would like me to omit from the interview? And if you think on it later, and you can also email me be like, “Oh, I said this, and…”

Mara 1:03:15
I think I'm good. I think it's all okay. Yeah. Okay. If I think that's something, I'll email you.

Kiera 1:03:20
Um, and then I just am going to say that the interview will be transcribed, and the audio and visual recording will be deleted immediately after the transcription is created. And the research collected for the study will not be used for any purpose besides the senior thesis.

Recording Ends.
CHARLENE

Recording Begins

Kiera 0:01
Do I have your consent record this interview?

Charlene 0:05
Yes, you do.

Kiera 0:07
Okay. And then I'm going to just ask some preliminary questions like, so if you'd like me to use a pseudonym to refer to you what name would you like me to use, or what would you like to go by?

Charlene 0:31
Ah, I don't really care.

Kiera Havill 0:35
Okay, so I can use your real name

Charlene 0:37
Sure. Yeah, I mean I'm gonna have to think about that. The only other option is like a variation I normally go by Charley, as an option, so.

Kiera 0:39
Okay. And then if you're comfortable sharing your gender identity and pronouns, how you identify racially, and whether you consider yourself a young adult, middle aged adult, or a senior.

Charlene 0:59
Oh, so I identify as a woman, she/her pronouns, racial identity is a complex one. Racially identify as white, but ethnically identify as Korean and German. And then my age, I guess I'm middle age, at this point at 33 I guess, young, I mean, like a young middle age? I don't know that's kind of around where I'm at.

Kiera 1:28
Thank you. Um, yeah, there's no wrong answers. Okay so, and then what is your educational background so where did you get your bachelor's degree and where did you get your teaching credential?

Charlene 1:41
Okay, so I got my bachelor's degree from UCLA, and I got my bachelor's degree in history. I don't have a teaching credential right now actually. My master's is in sociology from San Diego State. I'm currently in a PhD program for education. And so, I have temporary credentials right now because the school was able to hire me without them as a kind of interim credentials.
Kiera 2:08
Okay and then which subject do you teach in high school?

Charlene 2:13
I teach the humanities - so I teach, okay so I teach actually a couple different things. I teach the humanities. So, in that, in the humanities block I teach English and History. And then I also teach a class called Design.

Kiera 2:27
Okay, and then how long have you been teaching at the high school level?

Charlene 2:32
At the high school level, I've been teaching for well, full time… for one year and two months, almost to the day.

Kiera 2:39
Cool. Okay. And then the last one for the background teaching questions is, what inspired you to be a teacher, and did you have any mentors that heavily influenced your journey to education?

Charlene 2:51
So, while I have been teaching secondary school only for a little over a year, I was subbing for the school in like different capacities for about a year before that, but I was also a sociology instructor for three and a half years before. Educational researcher, I felt very strongly that if I was going to be able to criticize K-12, which I did frequently, that I really needed to be also be in like in the throes of it because so frequently researchers like to crap all over teachers without knowing really what it means to be a teacher. And, you know, thinking that 1 to 3 years of classroom experience is enough to say, “oh yeah those teachers are terrible people.” And while yes of course there are terrible teachers, there's no I'm not even there's no denying that, right, but I also think that there are so many variables that teachers have to combat that, um, that I just felt like it was necessary - also I really liked teaching. And when I was subbing, it was one of those things that just kind of confirmed that that was the route that I wanted to go so I liked teaching at the community college level, I liked teaching at the four-year university level, but there was something missing. So, when I was subbing, I always felt like that's where I was supposed to go, and I've actually always had wanted to be a high school teacher since I was in high school, and I just never did because I didn't get the right guidance on how to get my credential, I didn't get the right, you know, suggestions, there was a lot of things that kind of just prevented it and so when I had the opportunity, I took it and it just was kind of perfect timing. In terms of mentors, I've had quite a few. My middle school English teacher was a very big mentor for me. And then my high school band teacher was a great mentor for me and then to keep going in the direction of, you know my graduate level sociology instructor Dr. C, and just, you know, kind of just like different things along my journey too.

Kiera 4:46
Okay, so then for the main question so do you try to inspire, critical thinking within your students and how and like would you say you have a current teaching style or pedagogy and what would that look like?

Charlene 5:20
So, I definitely align very closely with critical pedagogy. That is my, that's my teaching philosophy - that's the center of who I am. Within that, I would say dialogical pedagogy, dialogic pedagogy specifically, so you know the use of dialogue, beyond it just being speech and conversation though, for me it's a matter of like critically engaging with material. So, one example is with my 10th graders, for instance, instead of just covering the material we actually went through and broke down the California state standards. So, what I did with that was I brought up the state standards for what it meant to be a world history student in the state of California, and what the outcomes were and when we went through, we started keeping record of like what the whole goal was, and on their own they arrived to the realization that the state standards, basically we're teaching them how to understand Western political thought, because that's what it says in the standards and they connected that to understanding our role as folks in the U.S., rather than it being world history. They noticed that Latin America and Africa were only mentioned once in all of the state standards, and because it's an English and history class, we discuss a lot of materials, and they on their own arrived at the understanding of it being very deeply like an anti-Black kind of narrative because of how many people have left out from a world history perspective. So, for me, a lot of it is encouraging them to ask questions that they may not even come up with on their own. From also the mind that education is not neutral, right, so like from a very Freirean perspective education not neutral. And, and so for me, they're going to be exposed to all of these main ideas for the rest of their lives so it's my goal is to introduce them to ideas that they aren't necessarily going to be introduced to at some point. So, a good example actually is we were talking about like distribution of power in different economic systems. And we arrived to capitalism, and we were drawing it together and I drew a picture that distribution or what, theoretically, these things are supposed to look like. And one of my 10th graders that said, “you know, Charlene, that looks an awful lot like a pyramid scheme.” So, for me it's really, really encouragement to look at the “Big Whys” and like, for me also having them like one of the running themes is in all of my classes is a who’s narratives and voices are being included and who's not and why. So, I always encourage them to look and question the role of power and then how they arrived to whatever conclusions is up to them.

Kiera 7:57
Thank you. There's a lot of good information. Okay, and then how much of “you” do you display to your students? Or, in other words, how much are you feeling like you're authentically yourself while teaching and interacting with them versus performing? Like wearing a ‘teaching hat’ and ‘Charlene hat’?

Charlene 8:24
Um, you know, I think that's one of my strengths. I don't have a whole lot of confidence and a lot of things I do I think one of the strengths that I have is not feeling obligated or, you know, I pretty much my Charlene hat, my teaching hat, my student hat, they're all very similar. I kind of made a decision very early on that I was going to commit myself to being as authentic as possible. High school students… they know when you're being authentic or not right, like they,
they can, they can sense it. They know when you're being true, you know, and, unlike other folks, from experience, they will have no problem calling you out on it or resisting in some way, right? They'll push back and push back and push back as much as possible, and push you to your breaking point because that's what kids do, like they're trying to test their boundaries, right? I committed very early on to try to be as authentic as possible. There are things that I can't do, of course, as a, as a high school teacher that I could do in college, of course, you know, I had to put my filters on with my language, very differently. You know, you have a unique experience between having like at college you have a lot more academic freedom for high school you have to work with the parents and the families and the Guardians right and different community members, so it's a very different thing. So, I would say I do have a slightly different. Okay, so my college instructor hat is very different and like is the same as who I am, I would say almost to a T. My high school, one is a little more toned down, but I wouldn't say I wouldn't say that it sacrifices who I am, though. I'm still pretty, pretty mouthy and sarcastic so, you know, it works out.

Kiera 10:04
So, if you're willing to share, like, more specifically what is that line? Like what are you toning down?

Charlene 10:14
Just my language. My language and how critical I am with criticizing certain things. I am a big believer that, you know, education cannot be neutral because you either are one side or the other right and if you aren't calling out white supremacy, if you aren't calling out white supremacy, then you're allowing it right you're allowing it to happen and you're condoning it. But at the same time, I also want my students to arrive to the conclusions on their own with guidance. So, as opposed to like my college where I would just blatantly say, “yeah I'm anti-capitalist.” I will do that at one point, but I'm not as explicit right away at the high school level because I want them to be able to arrive to things on their own. So an example would be the conversation with capitalism, I didn't go out and blatantly say, “you know, capitalism is an evil, that I want that I think needs to be dismantled.” We eventually got to that point, when we talked about it, but I want them to arrive to it at some point on their own without guidance, or you know whatever they're going to arrive to. But my goal is to help give them the tools to make those decisions and to come to that point as opposed to just kind of putting it out there.

Kiera 11:29
Perfect. Okay and then, so this is more vague but like, what would you say the social norms within your classroom? How do you influence those norms? When do you break those norms? How do your students, and how do you respond?

Charlene 11:52
So, I think I actually to answer this question, I think I have a very unique experience in that, when I started teaching, I had come in at the very end of a semester, mid-year, so those norms had already been established before I got there. So, this presented some new and unique challenges for me because I, you know, teaching college previously I was able to establish norms in my classes and just from the get-go, but they're also college students and adults for the most part, right, so those are different experiences. I entered this high school class, and the norms have
already been established, so that was a rough transition for them because I had a very different approach than the previous teacher. I had a different approach, I had different standards - I had high expectations because I am a big believer that too often, teachers conflate expectations with social justice or lack thereof. So, thinking that, “Well, my students are behind so I'm not going to have high expectations,” realizing that that just perpetuates the levels of like racism that's deeply embedded in our teaching. And so a lot of these students in this particular grade level were far below grade level in reading, far below grade level in writing, and they had been very used to this to being kind of, I don't want to say coddled, because that's not the right word, but just kind of pushed through, like pushed through, just not like, you know, “Oh you didn't do the assignment so I'm going to give this to you.” And yeah, there's different ways to assess students, absolutely. Like I'm a big believer in, you know, different modes of expression and different modes of assessment for sure, but there was there's a difference. And so for me, establishing those norms were important or re-establishing them. So, one of the first things I did was I looked at the class and we had those long like black tables that normally you find it like science labs, and I went in and they were originally in like double rows, so you have one here one here, one here, one here, and my first day I went in, I looked at the classroom. And before I had any students I went in and completely rearranged the room. I took them out of that, and I turned it into a giant square, so that way it was more of like a circle setting than these fragmented and segmented desks. I also moved the table to the side of the room so it was more of a conference table, and I didn't have a desk, what I did was I sat either at the table with them, or I would walk around to help guide them and stuff. So, for me it was a lot of establishing a non-hierarchical approach, that really, for me the norms is really big about decentering the teacher from the center of the focus, basically. So that's why I sat with them. They were not used to that. But in order to keep those, I was very consistent. I also have a very firm kind of approach to things, so, I'm not a jerk, and I'm very big on, like, building relationships, but they're also teenagers. And we have a very strong relationship, but it's also because I'm firm, like I'm firm because the structure is necessary and students need to know that as an adult, you are going to provide them structure that they may not get elsewhere. So for me it's consistency. So like creating a non-hierarchical approach, while also maintain a level of structure is vital for how I organize my classes, and then really centering their lived experiences. You know, I also am very explicit with why I do things, so instead of just redesigning the class, even though they complained about it I also told them why and I told him this because you have to look at each other now. Like you have to look at each other, and you have to humanize each other. So, these little fights and stuff aren't going to happen, they don't go down like that. And so that's, I don't know if that answers your question but those are some of the norms that I approach it with, and keeping the consistency is key for me.

Kiera 16:19
I love that. I don't think anyone else has talked about the actual physical layout, which is so important. That's really cool that you did that. And I just did a little drawing, this is what you mean right?

Charlene 16:35
Yep. So, what I did was I had offset the tables so you could walk into the middle, which is where like supplies and goods and stuff were, like, they could go stapling or like even just like fun paper like to draw on and stuff like that, so anybody could walk into the middle, but we were
basically in like an offset square so that we, it was still, we would have we had to face each other.

Kiera 16:56
Cool. Awesome. Um, and then you kind of touched on this but, um, what role does discipline play in your teaching style and how do you engage with the assumed and real power you hold as an authority figure?

Charlene 17:12
So, the first thing is I have a very, very different perspective - I'm aware that that punishment and discipline are very different. For me discipline should never be punitive discipline should always be, for the sake of learning, like fostering learning. So, I had one student who is very disruptive to the class, but it might be because of my sociological training, it might be because of who I am, I'm very observant. But I dedicated myself very early on to be able to like, observe my students and recognize some of the patterns and behaviors that they were exhibiting. So I have this little, I call it my magic trick that I can basically figure out students within a couple of days, not exactly of course like nobody knows anybody exactly right, but I had one student who had a really bad attitude, real bad attitude. And like she always gave other teachers terrible attitude she just she had a really bad attitude. But I never was punitive, because I didn't know her well enough, but she was also a good like a quote unquote good student, as in like she does her work, turns it on time, and it's quality work. But we were talking, and it was just like day three or four, and we were sitting in class and I've introduced myself, I explained a little bit of my background of what sociology is and I didn't quite grasp it yet at the time, but I remember with her, with her bad attitude she says, “so if you're a sociologist then tell me about myself.” And I said, well that's, that's not I'm not I'm a sociologist, I'm not a magician, like I'm not a mind reader. She's like “no if you can observe human behavior, tell me about myself.” And I stopped and I said, “Do we really want to do this?” And she said, “yeah.” And I said, “Are you sure we really want to do this because we're in front of all your classmates like I'm not gonna throw you under the bus.” And she's like, “No, really do it.” And I said, “I'm going to ask you one more time. Are you sure you want to do this?” And she's like, “Yeah, do it.” So, I looked at her and I said “Okay, so you have a really bad attitude that's pretty clear. Everybody knows that, but you really secretly want to be liked by all of your friends and your teachers and that's why you submit all your work on time, and you do really good work, but you don't want your friends to know how smart you are. So, you'd like to put it off and you have this bad attitude, and you'd like to think that 'oh, I don't care, I don't care what they think’ but you actually secretly really do care because you're a teenager and everybody cares. And even people my age really care so, that's kind of where we're at.” She looked at me, she turned to her classmates, she goes, “how did she do that?” She is now one of my closest students. I had to do a home visit for her because of like the pandemic her little sister and my daughter have met they're really good friends. When students give me bad attitude, she's the first one to call them out and tell them to cut it out. So, I call it my magic trick but it's because I'm able to observe students and I had one student who I've been observing for a while, and he has an IEP, and he has been treated very much like he is the quote unquote stupid student for most of his life, and he acts out a lot he acts out because the only attention he likes really is to have make people laugh, and he does a good job of it, he's very funny. He's also very bright, but he doesn't see it. And I remember one day he kept disrupting the class. I went up to him and I’ll call him E, and I said, “Look E, you can't keep doing this” And he's like, “I don't want to do this
work.” And I said “Well, you have to do the work. Let me sit with you we can work through it together.” He goes, “No, I don't want to.” And he was really angry because I was trying to make him do his work when other folks had just kind of let him go and not do it, and then they would just like pass him or he'd get half credit or something but again, it goes back to that idea of expectations, there's a difference between just letting someone go and so he was so mad at me and I jokingly said, “If you don't do this, I'm just gonna sit with you I'm gonna be your best friend for the rest of the day.” Because we had like a playful relationship, I’m like that with most of my students, and he goes, “I dare you. I dare you.” So, the next day I sat with him, and he was so mad at me, he was so mad at me, so I pulled him aside and I was like, “what's going on like you told me to do it.” He's like, “I didn't think you'd really do it.” I said, “Look, I'm a person of my word. But if you're mad at me, talk to me like it's okay to be mad at me because I make mistakes too, I need you to talk to me though if that hurts your feelings or that made you mad, that's okay, it's okay to have those feelings and I make mistakes but you need to tell me like you can't just keep acting this way, tell me to do it, and then get mad at me that I felt followed through. So, we need to have a conversation.” We had a talk in the hallway. And I said, “Regardless, you have to do your work, like you can't keep distracting your classmates like that's not okay.” And we had a heart to heart for a little while and we talked through and what it was is that he would rather hang out with his friends, but he also felt like he was too stupid to do the work, and it ended up us having to talk and we talked. And so, for me, the discipline is like, again being firm and structured so students know what to expect, having those expectations is so important because then there are no, there's, they can't question what they can and cannot do when they walk into your classroom. Because of different cultural norms and experiences students need to know what the norms are in the classroom. Part of that is developing those norms together. Part of it is also the teacher kind of develop the norms of structure, whatever that might look like. And so, my students also know that I will never send them out of the classroom. In the two months that I was there, I had never sent them out of the classroom. Meanwhile, there were many, many other teachers who were constantly sending students out of the classroom, there was never punitive, because our Vice Principal at the time was very restorative justice oriented so she'd have a talk and send them back to class, but I had never sent anyone out of class. They knew that would never be the case. They also knew that on the days they wanted to leave class, I still wouldn't send them out, so those expectations were always there. So, for me, right, that's what the role of discipline is. Also, as a teacher, being disciplined enough to know what battles I'm willing to fight and being disciplined enough to know as a teacher that my students oftentimes are acting out because they need something, or because of some sort of past trauma. For that student, if I had just putatively sent him out and disciplined him just for the sake of repercussions, I wouldn't have been able to really truly dig deep and understand that it's because he doesn't believe in himself, right, and I don't see myself as a savior, don't get me wrong, like I'm not saying that at all, right, but in the sense of like really truly understanding the root causes of things is so vital and I think so often, as human beings, and as teachers we’re more reactionary than we are responsive. So, I think that's how we have to approach discipline as being responsive rather than reactionary.

Kiera 23:52
Mhm. I got chills when you were talking about the first girl…

Charlene 24:03
Yeah, I call it my magic trick they actually, in fact, all of the 10th graders are convinced that I'm a witch, like, they will actually say that I'm a witch because of how easy I can observe people's behavior.

Kiera 24:15
Right. And do you think that that's like… like, part of my research so far, I'm realizing this ‘magic,’ or this art of teaching is… I guess, how much can you really measure this in like a thesis project because some of it is like, well, they're just charismatic and that's just part of their personality, and that's like individualized. So, I guess my question is, is that something you feel like you learned to do or where did that ability come from?

Charlene 24:54
I think there's a couple layers, I think I learned for sure because I was not nearly as like, outgoing, or using your word charismatic, you know, five years ago. When I first taught, I was very timid and did not have a lot of confidence in myself and my ability to teach it. So, part of it is learned for sure. I mean, honestly, and this is gonna sound kind of corny or whatever because of sociology, but I think a lot of it is the development of whether you call it this or not the sociological imagination; being able to see our individual experiences as a part of a larger collective is really, really valuable. And I think if you have any type of philosophy that focuses on individualism or individualistic ideals that that's not going to make you connect with your students, right? That doesn't mean it can't happen right of course there's outliers, of course there's gonna be a few instances of it, but I think if we really forget the collective and the patterns like, these things are not new right our students experiencing trauma is not new, I experienced trauma that's why connected with my teachers right? My mom was in jail for a lot of my childhood and when she wasn't, she was in NA meetings and my parents fought, there was domestic violence the house, so for me I was able to connect with some of my teachers, the ones that I connected with the most though, were the ones who were able to understand both the individual experience as well as larger social issues. So, I really think that that's where a lot of it comes from. I do think it can be learned, and I don't think that your personality necessarily plays a role, because I'm not the type of teacher who you're going to catch dancing across the floor. I'm not the type of teacher who is going to create Tik Tok dances with you, I might poke my head in and chuckle or make some sort of silly face in the background but I'm not the fun teacher, I am extremely sarcastic and snarky which goes over real well with middle and high school students. But I also am super witty, and I can run circles around most of them when they know how they can push boundaries, but that's not the case for everybody, some people connect with their students because they do sing silly songs or dance or jump up on tables and shout from the rooftops, right? So, I think that the personality might play a role in it, but I think really the bigger thing is being able to recognize things are beyond just yourself and build it like the power of connection and the collective. I think really having some sort of creative imagination is really key to understanding and being able to kind of work through this. Now where that develops, you know, I think that college is absolutely one of the places. I have students that from my very first semester teaching at the community college level who were emailing me were like, “you know I was at Jack in the Box, and I was looking at the prices and I was looking at the makeup of the workers and I looked at the neighborhood, and I started really thinking about how like, you know how these things are targeting these students.” It's four years later and if they just now click right. And so, I think, I think being able to be exposed to that stuff early is important, but we're so afraid… we're so like
focused on this idea of a value free education, that we're not allowing people to develop those
imaginations early, right? And most people aren't having conversations about capitalism with
their 10th graders, they're just not. And I'm not saying that I'm a pro or anything, right, but I
think that there is something to be said about introducing students, of all backgrounds and all
ages, to unique and different thoughts that are not necessarily considered 'value free,' because
we're so afraid of instilling values in our students, but I don't know, I don't know that that's a
problem.

Kiera 28:35
One of my questions is, do you connect lessons to the real world in student experiences and you
mentioned you did, but how do you do that?

Charlene 29:00
Well, okay. So last year as ninth graders they had just started reading *The Hate You Give*,
because we had like a relationship with another school, so they had just lent it to us, and they
were only on like chapter one or two. And in *The Hate You Give*, the main character, Starr, if
you're not familiar with it, she is a young Black woman who is going to a predominantly white
school because it's in a predominantly white neighborhood. And one of the things that I
immediately started talking about, I asked them like, “why, like, why is this happening?” And
they didn't quite piece it together or anything but then what I started doing was I connected the
experiences that Starr was going through and why her neighborhood was what it was to the
issues of redlining, for instance, and how redlining absolutely plays a role. So we started talking
about that in connection to San Diego neighborhoods, and where some of the wealthiest
neighborhoods are and where some of the poorest neighborhoods are and why? It's not because
those neighborhoods, and those folks in there didn't work hard enough, it's because it was
intentionally designed that way, right? We are, we are a school that's called D.T. and because of
that I talked about as much as I may have issues with D.T. as a whole, sometimes, I think that we
also have to talk about the role of design and how things are designed intentionally, right? And
so, we talked a lot about that in our class. In terms of like real world like, I mean, I don't think
there's been a single class that I haven't talked about white supremacy, or racism, or ableism, or
sexism or talked about, you know, transgender identity or, you know, some sort of variation
because I think that students will not be engaged if they don't understand it. So right now, we're
reading *American Born Chinese*, which is a graphic novel, and it focuses only on anti-Asian
rhetoric. And one of the things that we've talked about is writing devices and writing techniques,
and we talk about the role of writing techniques and devices, and how those can be used to send
certain messages and convey certain things. So, it's interesting because we think a lot about how
students with certain backgrounds can't comprehend or grasp certain things or whatever right,
but they're all 14, 15 years old. They also, on paper, have reading levels that are as low as the
third grade reading level. However, when I'm talking about these things and talking about visual
literacy in a graphic novel, they understand it right? Because this is the same group that had said
that capitalism look like a pyramid scheme or the same ones that are looking at the state
standards and seeing how steeped in white supremacy it is right? So, on paper, they're not doing
well, right? But they understand it; socio-politically they get it. And so, in this graphic novel,
we're talking about all of these things and I started connecting the materials, both to different
types of racism that they, or we, or people might be experiencing, but also discussed it in terms
of the anti-Asian rhetoric that really came from COVID-19. And I indirectly call them out
because last year I remember when it started, there was a lot of anti-Asian jokes that were coming up from the high schoolers, and they’re high schoolers so they don't think it's necessarily harmful at first, but I called out some students last year very directly. And then this year, you know, we talked about it and I didn't say “Oh, all of you…” But I did say last year, “You might remember that there was a lot of anti-Asian conversations and these are the things that we have to remember and how we're perpetuating it.” I talked a lot about how all of us are socialized under White Supremacy, so we all have to unlearn this and connect the books to both our thought processes, what we're doing, and like, the larger society. Another example might be the memoirs that we did. I talked about writing techniques and like visualization and things like what should go into a memoir, but then made sure that I highlighted that yes, well this is for me to gauge your writing skills. This is an opportunity for you to really talk about your lived experiences and they had some like really amazing memoirs, but that's for all the things we're doing, we're starting to poetry unit next week and we're going to do the same thing we're going to talk a lot about poetry as resistance and historically and the ways that they could resist some, you know, harmful stereotypes or resist, you know, problems in larger society through the word the usage of words. So, for me it's not just about, we have to study English because it's highlighting the necessity of literacy as a means for like navigating a lot of oppressive systems.

Kiera 34:12
Thank you.

Charlene 34:13
Sorry, these are the things that I could talk about all day.

Kiera 34:16
Please don't apologize. This is awesome. Okay, so I'm going to kind of combine these two questions. How do you define progress within your students, and how do you measure something that is measurable, such as your ability to influence them?

Charlene 34:37
That's a good question. So, there's your typical assessments, right? I actually am not a big fan of tests. So, I don't tend to do tests. So even in a virtual setting, I have created virtual writer’s notebooks, and the idea is for them to be able to see their growth and development over time, as well as for me to kind of see their growth and development over time. So, a lot of it are like formative assessment so ongoing things, and then generally there's a final project that is like the cumulative kind of summative, you know summative assessments at the very end that are more high stakes. So, my formal assessments are more low stakes more about completion and learning and development, while the summative one is a higher stake one but even then I give them opportunity to kind of get feedback and resubmit. But I also look at progress in other ways too, like are they using the vocabulary that we've developed in their language when they respond to me or when they're writing. So, I mentioned like, hearing my 10th graders use words like dehumanization, or White Supremacy, or internalized racism, right? Or hearing them use these words on the regular is also - it's an assessment. Because these are not words that they would have necessarily used prior to the class. So being able to gauge like the change in their language and interaction is important as well. I also see like, you know, how their interactions as a whole have changed, both with me and with each other. Because I think that's an important part of
learning too that says like social, emotional, mental kind of state of growth too, because like are they developing a level of, you know connection that maybe wasn't valued as much before? So that's one. In terms of, like, impact and influence, honestly, that's a tough one because… It's rough like so this is like a double barrel answer because on one hand, yes, my role is to influence students of course positively. But on the other hand, I feel like, oftentimes that comes from a top-down approach, like, “I'm the influencer of my students.” Right? And it's like, of course, like everybody in our lives influences us in some way, shape, or form… whether it's good or bad, negative or positive. My goal isn't ever to influence them but rather for them to both develop new tools and to recognize the strengths that they already have and to use them in a different way. So, in terms of like influence or like impact, I don't really seek that out. Sometimes it's a nice reminder, I'm not gonna pretend it's not - it's a nice reminder when I get emails from students later, or I have students hang around and talk to me or even when they send me an email, they're like, “I trust you and so I'm just really struggling right now…” You know, telling me that they trust me and see if they can turn stuff in late because they don't think other teachers will let them. Those are those are the moments that I feel like, you know, I think that's what it is - it's that influencing them in other ways is not my, like - do I provide a safe space for them to feel like they can express themselves? That for me is the biggest thing. And so, I generally will measure that in the willingness to talk about tough conversations, their willingness to hang around and talk to me afterward, and even in little things like in the middle of last semester I was like, “So how's everybody doing like I know it's stressful. This is not an ideal situation, how are you doing?” And one of my students responded, he goes, “You know, I'm doing okay, but how are you doing Ms. Charlene?” So, being able to like turn that around and be able to care enough? That stuff matters to me. That stuff matters to me more than my ability to long-term influence them, because they're gonna all have interests on their own, whether I do it or not, right? And my job is more just to kind of guide them and help provide like critical tools to see the world differently. And that's done through, again, like, you know, just some of the interactions that we have in the classroom or through their work.

Kiera 38:33
Awesome. Okay, so, what are the key differences for you between a “good teaching day” and a “bad teaching day?” And what are the most rewarding things about teaching for you?

Charlene 38:54
So, I think a good day for me is when I do have a lot of energy and I feel just like super in tune, and I'm getting them like engaged and interacting. But I do want to know that my definitions of good and bad teaching days have varied since the start of the pandemic. In person, I can get immediate feedback, right? Like even if they're not giving me feedback, I can watch their body language, I can see them, I can hear their tone of voice, I can watch their group interactions… online is a whole different ballgame. Like, I will say, many of my colleagues are struggling because they don't get that instant gratification of it. And I think one of the advantages I have which is um, I was a gamer for a lot of undergrad. And so developing community and relationships in an online environment is not foreign to me. And so that is something I think that I was able to kind of see through is like the issues of like not hearing them talk right away like I have friends that I have been friends with for like 11 or 12 years now and I never met them in person until like, I don't know, two years ago, and we're just like we're some of the closest friends, and so I think that that is one of the advantages is recognizing the power of online. Now,
don't get me wrong, I did not want to be online forever. Online is horrible forever. That idea is terrible, but I do think that there's something to be said about tapping into things in a different way. So, my definitions of good and bad are very different right now. In a bad teaching day, a bad teacher day I'm kind of snippy I'm like, “Why aren't you guys doing your work, why is it that two people out of, out of 50 students haven't turned in their work?” Like so sometimes I do get a little snippy. And that's just a bad day because I'm like, that is a bad teaching day because for me, I'm like, “Am I not doing something right? Like, why aren't they doing their work, did I miss a step like, am I not being clear enough?” And so, that reflects a lot in my preparedness sometimes too, so like, what are we going to do. I will say I think some of my best teaching days though are when I do things last minute. I like, I get super inspired I'm like man--

So a good example is, we're reading *American Born Chinese* as I said, but it was a super last minute because I hadn't prepared and planned, because I was grading, and pandemic teaching is a whole different thing, and I was stressed and I have my own stuff going on, and I'll be honest, I did not prepare this particular day, and I woke up and I was like, “Oh my gosh, I have to teach in 40 minutes. What am I going to do?” On like spur of the moment, I was like, “You know what, we're gonna read *American Born Chinese* now.” And I read it out loud to them. They're almost 16 years old, but I'm reading out loud to them because reading out loud provides a different type of context, then making them read independently and me reading out loud is helpful because every step I can break it down as we go through and it helps develop their reading comprehension in ways that they weren't wouldn't have on their own. And so that was one of my best teaching decisions was a last-minute decision and it's proved to be super useful that I'm going to use even when we're in person. Now, the difference between them really boils down a lot to my preparedness as a whole, and whether or not I'm able to connect things. So, like we, there was one time I was having a really rough day and I was not in the right state of mind to teach, and I was like you know, they're gonna watch a documentary. It wasn't the best lesson. It was a terrible one, but it wasn't the best lesson it wasn't directly connected to what we're talking about. But what I did was I framed it in a way of like the necessity of ethnic studies in what we're doing as opposed to it being connected in terms of content. So, I think sometimes that's a bad teacher day is when my lessons are disjointed. The good teaching days are when I'm energetic and I'm on a roll, and I can connect a connected to their lives. What was the last question that you had in that?

Kiera 42:53
I just said, what are the most rewarding things about teaching for you? If this is repetitive, it might be repetitive, we can also move on.

Charlene 43:03
I mean it's only slightly repetitive. I think the most rewarding thing though for me is to see their growth. So, like, that doesn't even have to take long answer that just to literally see their growth. Going back to what I said like, hearing them use words that they hadn't used before, and being able to analyze content in ways that like, they weren't, I don’t want to say they weren't able to, but they were maybe doing before but didn't articulate in that way, so being able to see their growth in their analysis and the language that they're using, is probably the most rewarding.

Kiera 43:32
Okay, and I just have a couple left, but one of them is if you're comfortable sharing, how do your own identities, whether it be gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, ability, etc., influence your teaching in the classroom, if they do, or do you share those identities with them?

Charlene 43:53
So, yeah, actually, I'm very upfront. First off, I'm real white-looking, so that's not a secret and in all of my high school classes, I only have a handful of white students. Most of my students are, Black or, you know, or Latino, Latina, Latinx, and so that's the majority of my students, so it's not a secret that I'm super white looking in that classroom. Like it's not secret to anybody. Um, but there are other elements of my identity that I don't necessarily share. Like they know I'm a mom, but they don't know that I'm disabled, like that's one thing that's a relatively recent thing that I have disclosed. I tend not to disclose a lot of parts of who I am, not because I'm trying to be secretive but because I don't like to have my like attention on me, that's one of those things about me, but I also feel like it's important to share those things with students because there's nothing wrong with our identities. Um, so I am very upfront with my students that I'm aware I'm White, and I'm aware that I benefit from these privileges like I'm aware of it, it's not a good thing, right, it just means that it is, and so I'm very upfront with them, with my awareness and recognition, I'm also very upfront with, you know, whiteness as a concept, that continues to do this. Disability does influence me a lot though because I am very critical of what's called “Special Education” which is a problematic phrase. A lot of the disability community's voices are not represented in “Special Education.” And a lot of the textbooks and training and stuff, neglect disabled voices, and so, I will say that in my interactions with students that have IEPs, are very different probably than most of my colleagues, because I am a big believer in both accommodations as well as high expectations. I think that often we, that's another thing, we conflate accommodations with low expectations - they don't have to be. And so, I work very closely with students from different experiences and backgrounds, I'm a big believer in universal design, so it does impact how I navigate the world, for sure. My gender identity I mean I'm a cisgender woman, so I don't have a marginalization in that area either, I mean, as a woman, but right, there's layers of it. But I also will make sure that I call out that, you know, white women were the first ones to vote for Trump. Like they were the number one group to vote for Trump. So, yeah, maybe you have a marginalization as a woman, but white women are also some of the major upholders of white supremacy. So that is how it influences it I will call it out - I also will gladly accept jokes. So we were talking about, we were, I was talking to them about the sociological imagination and like developing that, and one of my exercises which I, this is one of those rare moments where I'll toot my own horn is, I take a Starbucks cup, and I asked them analyze this, and I do this across all my grades and they're like, well it's a Starbucks kind of like okay so let's dig a little deeper, and like I don't know, one funny thing was one of my students was like, “white people drink Starbucks a whole lot.” And I was like, “Okay so what does that represent?” And they're like, “it represents Karen's.” I was like, “Okay what does that represent?” Getting deeper and one of them joking, they're like, “Oh, Ms. Charlene probably drinks Starbucks all the time.” And I was like, “I might, but I don't like pumpkin spice lattes so I'm not that basic.” So, I'll call it out and joke with them. I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with pumpkin spice lattes, but I was a part of the joke. Like that's my point, right? Like I will play into it because I don't have a problem identifying and recognizing my identity. Because, like, it's, it's a part of who I am but it's also part of who they are, right? My identity is a part of the experience that they're going to have in my classroom so I can't pretend that those don't exist.
Kiera 48:14
So, in terms of the difference in racial identity, do you feel like that there's a barrier that you like, in terms of, like, trust or gaining trust that you have to break through?

Charlene 48:33
So that's an interesting question that I don't know that I have the right insight to answer. This particular group of students … we've talked a lot about these big issues, but they have told me themselves that like they themselves had told me that dealing with these issues and representation in the material is not important to them, it's more about the connection with the teacher. But I don't think that that's a fair statement to make for all students. Of course, right, yes all of my students of this particular grade level in high school are Latino, Latina, Latinx, and this particular class, with a handful of Black students, and so, I don't want to say that that speaks for all students. I mean, I want to say yes, there is probably, but I don't know that it's a matter of, I mean, I don't know. I can't answer that question. Of course, part of me wants to say yes, part of me wants to say no, I'm not sure how to best answer that question, sorry.

Kiera 49:42
Yeah, that's fine. I was just curious, because I'm in this class called, Intersectionality of Leadership, and I can send you the syllabus, it's so good. But there's this thing called the “Interpersonal Gap,” and like we all have interpersonal gaps with one another, and you can never not have an interpersonal gap, but you can have conversations that make that gap smaller because the gap is caused by assumptions and stereotypes and all these other things that aren't discussed.

Charlene 50:19
I mean, that's an interesting thing to think about for sure. I mean okay so in terms of interpersonal gaps, there definitely are, right? And but I think that I think that we as a class as a whole really did try to establish a space to be able to talk about them. Right, not like not going out of my way to pretend that there isn't some sort of racial difference, like obviously there are, right? Like, yeah, maybe I can understand them on like a socio-economic status. I can't understand them fully on a racial level, right? I can understand some folks in terms of like not feeling like you belong because, I was very connected to my ethnic and cultural background, I'm Korean but I look white, right? I can connect that, but I can't connect those experiences with, you know, a Brown student who’s, you know, uncle or mom or somebody was harassed by police in the same way. Like, my mom experienced different levels of police issues because she’s an Asian woman, but those are very different experiences still. So, you know, addressing it in that way there's definitely interpersonal gaps, but I think that we had established a space to really talk about them. And one thing is like I still go out of my way to never call them my classes, I will always go out of my way to say our class, always. And the students may or may not hear it, they may not recognize it, but I make sure to go out of my way to do that.

Kiera 51:55
Okay. Thank you. Okay, there's a couple more. So, in terms of teacher burnout…

Charlene 52:12
Phew! Yeah, let's talk!

Kiera 52:13
Yes, I'll give you a second! Because if you're putting in all this effort, emotional and physical, like, everything you mentioned, is so, you know, you're not just a teacher, right? So, what are your strategies, if you have any, to mitigate that burnout or what keeps you going when you're like, “this is so much.” And if you're comfortable sharing that's totally okay too.

Charlene 52:54
No, I'm not uncomfortable at all. I just don't know how to answer it. I think. I don't know. I think there's a lot of things that play a role. I feel very fortunate to have gone through my master's program and part of my PhD before I became a teacher. And I know this is like, starting way back and not directly answer your question, but I think that plays a lot in my ability to not burn out. Because I went into it already knowing that many of my students, regardless of grade level, we're going to be having had experienced some sort of trauma and knowing that. That was one thing. I oftentimes was like the trusted one in college too, where students like there I had a student who reached out to me asking me if she could turn in her assignments late because she had to flee home because of a domestic violence situation. And I told her I was like “You know what, I've already assessed you and you've turned in enough stuff for me to assess it, we'll see what happens you know, if you feel up to it, then you can come back to me, but if you don't feel up to it, we'll talk later.” So, I think that that was one of the things for me that really kind of prepared me, I really don't have an answer because, quite frankly, I do get really burnt out and really exhausted, and just to kind of give you an idea, so I started teaching on January 16th of 2020 full time, right, I was teaching obviously college before and subbing before, but it was different. Full time teaching - January 16th, 2020. You know what I had on my very first day of teaching? A lockdown. My very first day there was a bomb threat right across the street, down the street from us, and I didn't know how to lock my doors, I didn't know where our plan was, what our route was, there was a bomb threat on my very first day. And, my boss, jokingly after everything had calmed down, said, “Hey, Charlene, did you notice something?” I was like, “What's that?” And he goes, “Did you notice that we've never had a lockdown before you started working here?” And I was like, “thanks. Thanks, I appreciate that.” It was a joke, of course. But that was the very first day. My very first day, full-time teaching started with a bomb threat and a lockdown. And my last day of teaching in person ended up with doors closed due to a pandemic. I spent most of my high school teaching career online than in person. During that time, I have been the person who my students have called at one in the morning because their dad pulled a knife out on them, or because somebody tried to sexually assault them in their room, and they didn't feel safe anymore and they were scared. I was the person that people reached out to because the students wouldn't respond when their brother overdosed and died from a fentanyl overdose, and I was the only one that he would respond to, I was the teacher who would stay with them until midnight just to try to get them to get their work done so they could pass their grades. I'm the one that the students email me and say that their dad is psychologically abusing them and having inappropriate conversations with them, and it's a lot. It's a lot. And I do not think you're ever prepared enough to address that, and I do not think we have those conversations. I've never gone through teacher ed, but I've interacted with Teacher Ed enough, and I do not think we have those conversations enough. And so, to answer your question, I think, legitimately, the only thing that keeps me going is the realization that I have built this
relationship with these students and I have to stick it out now. Like I have to stick it out. Now, that's not the healthiest and that will not work for everybody and nor would I ever expect other teachers to have that mentality, ever. For me personally, it’s because I don't have a coping mechanism, my coping mechanism is to not cope, that's with every aspect of my life. A lot of it is trauma induced. And for me, education was my safe space, when I was going through, you know, my own fair share of psychological and mental abuse at home. It was my safe space, so for me it's the realization of being that space for some of my students because they may not have anyone else to go to. But again, I do not think that that should be the case for everybody. So, to answer your question, I don't have one because we don't talk about it enough to get across teachers, we're talking across teachers, but we don't talk about it enough as institutions or as organizations, and we do not provide regular coping mechanisms, aside from occasional, “Have a good self-care day!” or “Take care of yourself over the weekend!” And that's about the extent of it. I know that doesn't directly answer your question, but I don't deal with it, because I don't know how.

Kiera 57:47
No, that answers my question. Are there ever instances where, like, I feel like my personality is like low key a therapist, where like, I really want to help, I really want to be that person. It's almost a selfish thing, where I feel good, making you feel good, you know, I feel better, but it does drain me. And I haven't set a super hard boundary yet, which I'm trying to do but like, there's a point where I'm like, “You need to see a therapist, because I can't do this.” And so, I guess my question is, are there instances, because you just mentioned a lot of things, you know, and it’s also not on you obviously to like, navigate all of that, and there should be systems in place that are like there for you…

Charlene 59:13
Right, so I will say our organization has been very fortunate in many ways. They have secured a therapist, only for teachers, like for during this pandemic specifically, but I do think that that should be something that should continue, not just for the pandemic. So, I agree with you. In terms of like, you know with the students, it's such a rough place because I'm not a licensed therapist, I don't have experience with that. However, culturally, generationally and even just on a personal level, young adults, students, teens, they're going to go to who they trust. They're not going to go to a school psychologist if they don't trust them. And I've talked to students and I've said. “Hey, so and so is our school psychologist…” and before I can even finish my sentence they say, “I don't like her.” And I'm like, “Okay.” And so, I arranged like weekly meetings, and do whatever I can. But I think that that's one of the key things that people forget about with teachers is that we are not licensed therapists, but we are expected to be. And what do you do when you have students who don't trust anybody else? Right. And, and it's a rough one. It's a rough one. I think being transparent with them is important. But I don't know. I don't know how to combat that because if you don't trust them, like what are you supposed to do? Just leave them? Leave them in pain? Like that's not, that's not right either. So, I do think that having a school therapist for teachers is an important one because that level of trauma that teachers experience is beyond belief. And I think that it's often forgotten. So, you're right I think systems do need to be in place for sure to work with that. Yeah, and what I experienced, that's in my first year of teaching in the timespan of five or six months, right? Imagine the teachers now who are trusted teachers that have been working for 10 years.
Kiera 1:01:56
Mmmhmmm. Yeah. Okay. Um, so, we're basically done, but I created this word, *inspiragination*, inspire and imagination, to actually describe an experience I had with a professor of mine in my first year in college, because there wasn't a word to describe it. It's like that magic, where you're like, what? How do how do I emulate this? That's why I'm doing this project. So, I guess my question is though, like, off the top of your head, no wrong answers, like what would that word mean to you?

Charlene 1:03:05
I think that, like not to be repetitive and using a word to define another word, I think that, for me, it's not to be the one to inspire but like to be the inspiration but rather to inspire the imagination, right. So, I am a firm believer that we lose our imagination as we get older, not because we lose elasticity in our brain like some people will tell you, but because we're encouraged to conform. And the more you conform, the less imaginative you're going to be. And so, I think for me that word really like kind of encompasses the idea of fostering creativity and imagination, for the sake of your own personal endeavors and inspirations, as opposed to it being you being the inspiration of imagination.

Kiera 1:03:49
And then just bouncing off of that do you think you have encouraged, or do you think you encourage your students’ inspiragination?

Charlene 1:04:00
I'd like to think so. That's my hope, that's my goal. I think every once in a while, I do, and when I have students that are like, “Oh my brain is expanding.” Like I had the other day, I think so, but, you know, I also think that there's room for improvement as there always is. And so that's kind of where I stay fixated is where I can improve with that.

Kiera 1:04:19
Awesome. Okay, and then is there anything that you would want to share that we didn't get a chance to discuss if none of my questions prompted it? If you came into it like, “Oh, I wanted to say that.” But no worries if not.

Charlene 1:04:36
I think that teachers need to really question what they believe the purpose of education and schooling is because those are two very different concepts. And I think understanding education and schooling is two different concepts is necessary for most teachers. And I think that really can inform that inspiragination that you're talking about, because if my idea of education is to go in as a neutral point and just teach them these ideas of facts, then I'm not doing my job, right? Like my job, like, I'm sure you've heard this but there's kind of two main pathways and the roots of education there's Educare and Educere. And Educare is to basically reproduce and teach in the manner of past generations so that kind of repetitive conformity, but Educere comes from. Regardless of Plato being a jerk. Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* - The *Allegory of the Cave* is basically where these people have been in this cave for so long, they've been shielded from light and darkness and the only thing that they can see is their shadows because of the fire; they're
only familiar with the shadows. And basically, they come out of the cave because they've been in this dark cave aside from the fire for so long that they're blinded by the light, because it's so bright. And Educere means quite literally ‘to draw from darkness.’ So, the argument is, do we want an education that's rooted in Educere or Educare? You know, is your goal and role as an educator to draw from darkness, to bring them to have some sort of creative awareness or not? And I think so often teacher education programs, lack that question of themselves as well, because that really will define how you view yourself as a teacher.

Kiera 1:06:28
Perfect. Okay. And then lastly is just I'm creating a book list at the end of my thesis for fun for all these people. So, if you had either, or a fun book or a book that heavily influenced you to be as many as you want and you can email me if you think of them later do but

Charlene 1:07:02
Yeah, I'll email you because, what is this, this is directed toward teachers, or just anybody looking for teaching resources, what is this list for?

Kiera 1:07:11
It's just like, it's just a list, I guess, I mean for whoever reads this. I think teachers and students are probably going to be reading this thesis mostly but are students that want to be teachers too. But there's no like, there's no like confines to it really, it's just a book where you're like, “wow this is like this book changed my life” or like if there's something on the top of your head you read and you’re just like, “everyone needs to read this book before they die,” you know.

Charlene 1:07:42
I'm looking at my stack right now in front of my computer that I'm using for my dissertation work so I'm like okay yeah, there's some stuff for sure that I will send your way.

Kiera 1:07:50
Okay, thank you. Okay, so then there's just things I'm going to say at the end, which is, um, is there anything that you would like me to omit from the interview I can do so that you were like, oh I said that, but I actually don't want that to be included.

Charlene 1:08:08
Not necessarily. When I talk about the design thinking stuff. You make an acronym for I mean not an acronym like a pseudo name for the class. So if you want to just call it design that's fine. But that's maybe the only thing, the only thing that kind of is above.

Kiera 1:08:36
Okay. Um, okay, and then I'm just saying, going to say that this interview will be transcribed, and the audio and audio-visual recording will be deleted immediately after the transcription is created, and the research collected for this study will not be used for any purpose besides the senior thesis. So, okay, thank you. I'm going to stop recording now.

Recording Ends.
MIA

*Recording Begins.*

Kiera 0:00
Okay, so do I have your consent to record this interview?

Mia 0:04
Yes.

Kiera 0:05
Awesome. Okay, and then would you like me to use a pseudonym to refer to you, or are you okay with me using your real name?

Mia 0:16
I think that I would prefer a pseudonym.

Kiera 0:21
Okay, is there one that you would like, or do you want me to come up with one?

Mia 0:28
You have fun!

Kiera 0:29
Perfect. Okay, and then if you're comfortable sharing what is your gender identity and pronouns?

Mia 0:35
So, woman and I go with she/her.

Kiera 0:39
Okay, and then how do you identify racially and/or ethnically.

Mia 0:44
I identify as Asian-American. But I also really strongly identify as a Korean transracial adoptee.

Kiera 0:57
Perfect. And then, would you consider yourself a young adult, middle aged adult, or a senior? It's always a hard one I've found.

Mia 1:08
I feel like I'm in between.

Kiera 1:09
I know, I know…
Mia 1:11
I’m going to go with young adult still.

Kiera 1:13
Okay. Perfect. All right, so then those are the preliminary ones. So, what is your educational background? So where did you get your bachelor's degree and where did you get your teaching credential?

Mia 1:25
So, I graduated from Drake University with a major in secondary education, with endorsements in social studies and Spanish.

Kiera 1:39
Did you say Duke?

Mia 1:41
Drake, Drake… like the rapper.

Kiera 1:44
Okay, perfect. Sorry, I wasn't sure it was my transcription got that.

Mia 1:50
It had my teaching credential built into it, that's why the way that the program was built. And then I also got a master's in data and organizational leadership.

Kiera 2:04
Oh cool. Okay, and then, which subject do you teach in high school and how long have you been teaching at the high school level.

Mia 2:11
Overall or at my current school?

Kiera 2:12
Overall, but then you can talk about that too.

Mia 2:20
Okay, for sure. So, I have been teaching for 10 years. I have taught a lot of different subjects and grade levels. So, I've taught high school Spanish, that's how I started off. And then I actually taught ESL overseas… and then I taught ESL, in the states with kindergarteners, and I teach for this online school, and for them I teach Social Studies and Spanish. And then in a traditional brick and mortar school I've taught - this is like a journey, right? Where I’m currently I'm teaching humanities, which is a mix on English and Ethnic Studies. I also have, for the first time a Heritage Spanish class, and I'm also teaching Spanish.

Kiera 3:33
Wow, you have a full plate. Thank you. Okay. And then, what inspired you to be a teacher? So, did you have any mentors that heavily influenced your journey to education or how did you get involved in this?

Mia 3:47
So, I know like a lot of folks have this calling, or they've always known that they wanted to be, that's not me. I initially thought I wanted to go into international business because I've always loved traveling and just international world and cultures and whatnot. But then I changed my majors, several times I didn't really know what I wanted to do. And, based on some previous experiences working with young people. I really was like, I want to work with young people because, like empowerment and social change. And also, it's more fun than an office. So, then I landed on education because I could still take the classes, but I wanted, like the social sciences and language, but also be working towards a career field that I would find meaningful. Yeah, and so then as I got into teaching that's when I really started to understand more of like social systems and dynamics, and why empowerment and why education is so important and I quickly transformed my idea from just, you know, general empowerment and general education as good, to being like, no, this is like a really crucial tool for social change.

Kiera 5:13
Education?

Mia 5:15
Yeah.

Kiera 5:16
Yeah, totally. I love the word empowerment, by the way. Yeah, it's like, I love the word inspiration too, they kind of go hand in hand.

Mia 5:29
Yeah, for sure.

Kiera 5:30
So, the main question that my project is trying to, not answer but provide strategies for, is, do you try to inspire critical thinking or critical consciousness-raising within your students and how? And would you say that you have like a current teaching style or pedagogy to do that?

Mia 5:57
Oh, that's such a big question. And so, yes, to the critical thinking and critical consciousness. I think that is the piece that is often missing, or not really fully implemented, or implemented really strategically, right? We talk about critical thinking all the time, but I think it's an area that we really need to examine what that means and how, what that means in our classrooms, and what that looks like. In terms of strategies and how I go about that. I, you know, building relationships with students is foundational is they need to be able to trust you and there also needs to be an element of mutual trust and vulnerability, especially when you're getting into this critical-consciousness and talking about social systems and personal experiences and how these things go together. For me, that's huge, and that is an ongoing process. It takes a lot of time it
takes a lot of like missteps and apologies and, you know, really cultivating a sense of trust and community. And then the other thing is that I like to do is really bringing in real life context and not shying away from or not, sugarcoating or avoiding you know tough conversations that are needed in order to get to this critical consciousness. So, like talking about injustice and race and gender… all the things.

Kiera 7:37
Yeah, yeah, yeah. Are you doing in person right now, or no?

Mia 7:55
No, we start on the 12th!

Kiera 7:57
Oh my gosh. Wow. Okay, well, before, and I guess starting on the 12th, I'm curious what the nitty gritty details are of like what you just said, so how do you build those relationships. Are you using, like, outside of classroom time or what, how are you how are you making the content relevant to the students?

Mia 8:39
Yeah, so I'm going to bring in an example of how I go about teaching my Spanish classes. That's going to be probably the most concrete way and it's the process that has been evolving ever since I started teaching Spanish, as you know, an Asian-American teacher, right? Which isn't that different because the majority of Spanish teachers in the United States are actually white. So, but there's a different dynamic, being a person of color once you get to that space. And so being able to really talk about my own racial identity and cultural and linguistic background is super important because I think without acknowledging that we're ignoring the power structures that exist within U.S. education. And so, talking about that and like, incorporating it and really natural ways, like being up front with it but also, you know, just being organic about it too, and not being afraid to answer their questions or to incorporate my own experiences and really telling them the differences between language learning and language acquisition. In order to speak to students who grew up in bilingual homes or multilingual homes or in Spanish-speaking homes, letting them know that I'm not the expert and so I'm going to be bringing in people who are experts, talking about what it means is, what it means to be part of a Latinx community. And so really, mentioning that I'm not the expert and bring in materials that the students are going to be able to see themselves in but also, if they're not coming from a Latinx community or non-Spanish speaking, you know, and obviously have a really rich learning experience.

Kiera 10:38
Perfect. Okay, and then how much of “you” do you display to your students? So, in other words, how much are you authentically yourself while teaching and interacting with them and do you grapple with wearing your “teaching hat” and your “Mia hat” and where do you draw the line?

Mia 11:01
Yeah, so that's a really hard question. I try to bring in as much of my authentic self as possible. I think that for me, it's really important that they see me as like a full human being in the same way that I'm striving to recognize their full humaneness, especially with the commitment to build
that community piece. I mean, there are certain things you know like from a professional standpoint that you can't disclose to your students, like, you know, just certain frustrations, or, you know, work related things, especially if it might be affecting them. So, I think that's what's essential in order to build that trust. I also model with them, like, if I don't feel comfortable answering something, or like if there's a topic that I'm feeling particularly vulnerable about that we're talking about, you know I'm gonna name that so that they can start to build their own boundaries in respectful ways. And like that respect for privacy as well.

Kiera 12:29
And so, this is a question that I added actually after talking to [another participant], and this might differ across different classes, but is there a particular way you physically set up your classroom and is there intention with it?

Mia 12:48
Yes, there's definitely a lot of intention. Ideally, I've never been able to make this happen, with the furniture that’s in the room. But I would love to be able to arrange in a large circle, especially if I were to be teaching social studies. For Spanish, in particular, I like students at tables. And that's for group work and, and things like that. Yeah, my ideal would be to have furniture that super flexible and easy to move and rearrange, but that's not always the case, so it kind of just depends on what's there. Yeah, definitely, groups, at the very least.

Kiera 13:32
And when you said tables do you mean like in rows?

Mia 13:36
No, usually. Oh gosh. It depends how many students are here, how big is the classroom, but if able, I guess in pods, three to four students.

Kiera 13:55
What is the reason for that?

Mia 13:58
So, if I can arrange them so that there are groups of three, that's my favorite grouping to work with, I think that really fosters a lot of teamwork, naturally. Also, for me it's important that the students are able to discuss really easily, without having to move about the room. And also, it's more just part of our human nature to be sitting somewhat next to each other when we're in this shared space right? To sit in rows, to me, it feels really sterile. Yeah, that really takes away the opportunities for us to interact, like, just naturally and help each other with different things and talk about what's going on in our lives, just like a normal conversation, but also being in a group sets up for really intentional lesson planning.

Kiera 14:55
Okay. So, the next question is, what role does discipline play in your teaching and how do you engage with the real and assumed power you hold as an authority figure within the classroom?

Mia 15:10
Ah yes, this. It's important to be able to cultivate an environment where people can like, have a bad day, and it's gonna be okay. Right, so a lot of it is just you know having conversations, private conversations, with students who may not be engaging in community at that time, right? So, if a kid gets mad and walks out or is doing whatever else to disrupt, having a private conversation with them to see what's going on is always my first step. Also, setting firm expectations and letting the students be a part of that process, of course. But really sticking to those making sure that people understand what they mean, what they look, like what they sound like, and revisiting those when needed.

Kiera 16:05
And how do you make the expectations tangible?

Mia 16:18
Yeah, so we start the year, I start with just a few, basic stuff like, listen to understand, respect the space that people want it including yourself. Just like two or three, and then open it up to the students to see if they want to add more, you know, ask them like what does this mean to you as an individual. Start there. And then you know what does this mean for the people at your table. What does this mean, what does this look like, what are examples? And then have those class discussions. And some of it too, at least in the beginning of the school year, you know, you start with these with these discussions about expectations but sometimes like, you also have to be able to adjust them.

Kiera 17:10
Okay. Um, so how do you measure something that is in measurable, such as your ability to influence your students? So, kind of like, how do you measure your own success in that department, as a teacher?

Mia 17:39
Yeah. Right. So you said, how do I measure their success or how do I measure this?

Kiera 17:48
How do you measure like your own success, and that's kind of a buzzword, but I guess how do you know when you're like, Okay, this was a good day and I'm influencing them and, you know…

Mia 18:05
For me, the biggest sign of like a, like a good day or I can see that they're learning that they're thinking critically, that they're questioning is when they're engaged in class. And a lot of times it can be, you know, my lesson plan was beautiful, everyone was participating, and everyone was engaging, everyone was, you know, sharing, and whatnot. But also, sometimes that comes up spontaneously. So, like if a student asks a question, like a super like important critical thinking type question, that maybe I wasn't planning to go there yet, or maybe potentially even at all. But then that question will spark a discussion and it takes in a different way, based on what they're thinking.

Kiera 19:00
Okay, and then you kind of touched on this, at the very beginning, but if you're comfortable sharing how do your own identities, like gender, race, sexual orientation, ability, etc. influence your teaching in the classroom?

Mia 19:20
Yeah. So, my students and I were just talking about this the other day, like, what diversity looks like among teachers, and like, I, you know, I didn't have a teacher, an educator who was Black, Indigenous or POC until I was in college. And it was, it was something that I didn't realize that I was missing until I had it. Just because growing up and immersed in whiteness like I didn't think about it. And so that like unknowing really just made that light bulb go off in my head, like this is new! And why like I, you know all the things - you feel seen, you feel a little bit more connected. And so, that experience is something that has stayed with me. And also, like reflecting on, you know identity and personal experiences, and a lot of the unpacking that I've had to do just being raised, totally immersed in white culture, is I’m trying to show up as a teacher that I needed when I was in high school.

Kiera 20:52
Thank you. Sorry if it feels like I'm kind of just like rattling these out. I know I'm like, I think you're actually going to probably be my last interview, but I'm like, still grappling these social norms of interviewing and like, thanking them, and it's kind of funny.

Mia 21:20
It’s hard to interview someone sometimes, and like, it's definitely an art and a practice.

Kiera 21:25
Like, I want this to be a conversation, but I also want to get these questions answered. So, I appreciate your flexibility. So, okay, let's do… these kind of go hand-in-hand, but what are the most rewarding things about teaching and what have been some of the most difficult experiences you've had as a teacher?

Mia 21:51
Oh wow. So, I’m gonna take this in two different ways, is that okay?

Kiera. 21:59
Yeah!

Mia. 22:01
Okay, so I'm thinking strictly more about like classroom and students and teaching and learning. I mean, whenever you see something click for the students, you know, when you can actually see that light bulb go off - that's, that's such a good feeling. And also, something that is kind of both really challenging and also super rewarding is when the students are sharing and unpacking all the ways that they have been negatively impacted by whether education system, or basically harmed by the system, all of the systems of injustice, and they’re talking about and realizing it, and being able to connect that with class material, but it's heavy, right? And so having to process that and carry that as their teacher is hard, but important. The ways that they’re thinking and learning. And then the other side of that is working more within like the organization or the
education system. And something that I have found so challenging is the way that schools are, well very generally speaking the capitalistic nature of our education system. But then, the way that schools are talking about things. Like diversity and inclusion, and especially equity. But then, aren't following up and are not receptive to feedback, or change, or taking a closer examination of what was actually means and looks like in practice.

Kiera 24:15
Okay, and then this is also kind of a personal question, so you can pass it if you want, but have you experienced burnout and what are your strategies, if you have, a need to mitigate that burnout? So, what kind of like, keeps you going. Because we all know, teaching is exhausting, especially with the pandemic and everything.

Mia 24:39
Yeah, so the burnout. One is just loving the students. Right, really focusing on them and their care, and that's something that's you're like, “Okay, this is why I'm here.” The other thing is, and this is like really just more practical, but you don't have to grade everything, and you shouldn’t grade everything. Yeah. And, yeah, and I guess another practical level, having a couple of really strong strategies that you love and that are good and you can implement on the fly.

Kiera 25:26
Strategies for what exactly?

Mia 25:28
Oh, I’m sorry, teaching strategies.

Kiera 25:35
Okay perfect. Okay so another question, that is one I added, was about like the classroom being a political space - kind of about like the drawing the line idea. So, I'm curious where you fall in that in that spectrum.

Mia 26:32
I mean, I think the fact that this is a question, and not that this is a bad question I'm not trying to criticize you whatsoever, but yeah. But the fact that this question is being asked, really speaks to how much white supremacy and sexism and ableism, have influenced our education system – capitalism – so, so, so, heavily that we can't even talk about the social reality and dictate what happens. So yeah, I think about all of the things a lot. In Spanish class we've talked about imperialism and how that that looks like. And because we have to be able to name these structures in order to even talk about, not even like the world around us, yes, our experiences, but also our content. That's what we're doing, like, even like even something like math and science you know things are supposedly value free are not, that we really need to talk about that. And I think that something. So yeah, something that we are asked to do as teachers a lot, is to focus on, on diversity, right? And that was so watered down that I feel like it's actually becoming damaging because what we're doing is we're ‘otherising’ our students, right? They are the ones who are different, and we need to be the ones to accommodate that. But we are never as teachers, or rarely, at least in my experience, as to unpack our own biases that we bring into the classroom or on the experiences that have informed the way that we teach. And so, there's a huge
disconnect. Because in order to empathize the understand and show up in solidarity and talk about these, like, unjust, harmful, social systems, like we really need to be able to see where we are as teachers in it.

Kiera 28:58
That’s such a good point.

Mia 29:00
And I mean, the industry is like what, 80% White? And so I can talk forever about that.

Kiera 29:14
I mean, you're welcome to talk, if you want but, whatever you want to share.

Mia 29:22
Well, I mean, I think that's, that's a huge part right, and that's part of white supremacy cultures, the people in power not examining their own selves.

Kiera 29:39
Okay, Perfect. Yeah, I mean, it's very complicated. And I'm curious what's happening on the ground like, and what you're saying is making me think about like… Okay, let's say these students, you kind of open their eyes and it's like, shoot like, wow, how am I connected to this and there are emotions associated with that… like have you had experiences where students are… like feeling overwhelmed by what they're learning because it's so big, and it's abstract but it's also right in front of our face?

Mia 30:31
Yeah. My sweet, sweet 9th graders this year, they are always I can't remember what we were talking about and they're like, “Oh, is this another racist thing?” and I'm like, “Yeah, it is.” And I try to talk about these really hard issues, right, so like the effects of white supremacy culture and racism and sexism and all this stuff. We talk about it in the realm of systems, and try not to place blame on the individual, and also remind them that they have strong, powerful, and important voices. And that they have so much ability to harness that and to craft that and to learn more. And really just empower them to use their voice, whether that is, you know, finding their voice among so much marginalization, or finding their voice as an ally and an advocate and accomplice.

Kiera 31:49
Okay. And then, so I created this word called inspiragination, which is combining inspire and imagination. I'm just curious what that word would mean to you in this in the context of teaching?

Mia 32:27
To me, it sounds a lot like really just inspired curiosity. And to where students are looking at the world and they're asking why. They're wondering about things and things as they are, and as they have been, but also what they could be.
Kiera 33:01
That’s beautiful. Definitely gonna have that as a quote in my thesis! Okay, and then I just wanted to provide a space, if there was anything that you wanted to say that I didn't have a question that prompted it, but obviously if there's nothing that’s completely okay. If there was anything, I just wanted to provide that space.

Mia 33:34
Um, I don't think so. I am very excited about the research that you're doing, and I think that we need more of this, and not only in the, you know, higher education space, but like you said, on the ground, what's actually happening, in a practical way.

Kiera 34:00
Okay. And then the last questions just, if you had a favorite book that or books, plural that influenced you or that even just like a fun book. I'm creating a booklet at the end of my thesis just for fun, from all these cool people. So, and you can also email me if you think of later but if there's anything off the top of your head, you're like, “oh my gosh like this book changed my life.”

Mia 34:30
I'm sure Charlene said this too, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Kiera 34:35
That was the one that changed my life.

Mia 34:39
Yeah, that one was instrumental and piecing together so many thoughts in a really, really concise way. Yeah. Yeah, that one.

Kiera 34:56
And then, when did you have any, it doesn't need to be so, another one if you want like a, like Harry Potter or like a book that you're like oh I just love this book?

Mia 35:06
Oh God, let me see… *The Giver* was one of my most favorite books when I was like, like a middle reader. And I still enjoy rereading it today I found it to be so just grounding and imaginative and it's actually a four-piece quartet. I also read Harry Potter, and Gloria as the Borderlands. That was, was also hugely helpful for me,

Kiera 35:48
writing down. Perfect. Okay, yeah, we're gonna have a call list. Awesome, okay well I'm going to say, Okay, is there anything that you would like you do omit from the interview that you said where you were like, “oh I actually don't want that to be included.”

Mia 36:04
No, I don't think so. Okay. And then I'm just gonna say that this interview will be transcribed and the audio and or just the audio recording will be deleted immediately after the transcription is

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created and the research collected for this study will not be used for any purpose besides senior thesis.

Mia 36:24
Very cool.

Kiera Havill 36:24
Yeah, Okay, well I'm going to stop recording now.

Recording Ends.
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